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OLD
PLANTATION
HOUSES
IN
LOUISIANA

by

WILLIAM P. SPRATLING

Text by NATALIE SCOTT

with a preface by

N. C. CURTIS



WILLIAM HELBURN INC.

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IN
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BY
WILLIAM P. SPRATLING
TEXT BY NATALIE SCOTT

WITH A PREFACE
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PREFACE

BOOKS treating of architecture fall, generally speaking, into two groups—in some the method of treatment tends toward the impressionistic or pictorial, while in others questions of detail predominate.

In respect to Louisiana Plantation Houses, it will be granted by everyone who knows them in their setting, that they lend themselves particularly well to an impressionistic and romantic treatment, whether that treatment be in the form of written description or by the medium of graphic art, and that they would lend themselves rather badly to the sort of treatment which seeks to show the character of architecture by means of details and measured drawings. This same remark may be made, I believe, with equal truth and reasonableness concerning all the antecedent architecture of Louisiana whether we are considering the old courtyard houses of New Orleans, the plantation houses or any other regional development. As types they have in this sense a character in common with the rural architecture of Spain, which always seems to me to be absurdly presented when shown as line drawings and plates of measured details.

In seeking to analyse the architectural composition of Louisiana Plantation Houses as they stand, the quality that strikes one as most outstanding is the quality of Picturesqueness. Now picturesqueness

is essentially a quality that is not composed but freely results from time and the forces of nature. It is a fact that works of architecture do not as a rule become subjects for pictorial treatment until they tend to become ruinous. Nature must be in evidence and the softening and disintegrating effects of time must assert themselves, tending always, as they do, to disrupt and overthrow what the hand of man has shaped and set up. Granting then that Louisiana architecture is picturesque—and it is to a high degree—the artist contemplates it and he sees at once that it is in a state of incipient decrepitude. In recording his impressions, shall he show it as it is or as it was? If as it is, there comes before his eye through a vista of oaks, magnolias and the rampant verdure of old gardens, the leaning gate post, the broken fence, the fallen roof, the cracked and shaken stucco of mouldy and discolored walls.

The thing that I like best about this book is its sincerity—the truthfulness of the impression that it conveys. It is the same impression that so delights the imagination when one visits these old places in their natural surroundings. Who would prefer the cut-and-dried method of the architectural analyst to this? These drawings tell a story far more compelling and not less searching and complete, though it is perhaps a story that not everyone may read.

What is it that delights us so much about these old places? First of all I would say that it is the rare and unique beauty of their environment—second, the quality of the architecture itself, which is exactly suited to that environment and to the life of the times—and lastly to the appeal that the contemplation of things of age and beauty always makes to the imagination, bringing to life as it does the ghosts of the past; the planter once more comes out of his door and takes his seat in the saddle while Madame waves him goodbye

from the sunny veranda, the busy hum of the grinding and the songs of negroes are in the air, in the distance is heard the whistle of the steamboat on the mighty Mississippi or gently flowing Teche.

The lovers of this region will thank Miss Scott and Mr. Spratling for giving us the first real book on Louisiana Architecture—for his charming drawings which provide the setting and for her description which interprets for us the life of the time and makes the picture complete.

N. C. CURTIS.

New Orleans, September, 1927.



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CHAPTER I

THE EAST BANK OF THE MISSISSIPPI

*Destrehan, Sarpy, Welham, Uncle Sam, Bringier, Burnside,
Chatsworth, Cottage, Belle Helene*

EAUTY lies in the eye of the beholder," says Emerson, and the dictum has significance in connection with the "river roads," the wide smooth-gravelled sections of the Jefferson Highway that follow the maddeningly continual windings of the Mississippi between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Louisianians inevitably drive their favored visitors along it, and are some times abashed when a native of Connecticut or Virginia or some such alien state remarks casually, as a matter of course, that the road is not beautiful. The river is not visible. Actually, there is little more to remark than the low rolling hill which is the levee, on the one hand, with an unkempt growth of grass upon it, and beyond, occasional flutterings of feathery green willow tops; on the other, fields after fields, some growing in cane and cotton, some bare, low-lying, soggy with ancient "back-water,"

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with cattle grazing lazily in the lush grass, occasional small towns, clumps of magnificent old oaks, and now and then the bulk of a sugar-house with tall spindly stacks in the distance.

It is an awareness of the river that makes the beauty of the road. To enjoy it, one must have a mental fabric thickly interwoven with traditions and memories of the river, a mind suffused with tales and knowledge of it, scraps of stories of the old days when the river was the roadway, and the arrival of the river steamer the supreme event in the week on a grandfather's plantation; a feeling of the river as a destiny, a yearly menace in the spring, a benediction, a destiny that can be cruel or kind. There must be memories of pallidly bleak, wet spring days, when one has stood silent on the levee, with the river stretched out apparently level with its top, rushing by with an ominous murmur, the bank beyond visible not half a hand's breadth above it and tops of tiny houses showing beyond pitifully at its mercy. Memories of spring days filled with apprehension, out in the country, when, in the strengthening of a weak point in the levee, men worked night and day, workmen and masters, lawyers, doctors, and negroes all together, feverishly, while the women brought them coffee and food at intervals; memories of a crevasse, when the fields ended in an ugly yellow sea, dotted with forlorn roof-tops and wreckage of houses, and the air was filled with a booming, as the yellow water tore racing through a gash in the levee; recollections of plantation houses that have disappeared as the river ate its way, year after year, relentlessly through the earth before and finally beneath them. And with these, kindly memories, of gay hours on a boat brilliant with pennons, one of a fleet which set out flags flying and whistles blowing to meet the royal yacht of

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the King of the Carnival; of houseboats anchored on the banks, with happy, lazily contented families living there; of moonlit evenings in the country, when the nasally sweet, chanting music of negroes singing coming from a group of them sketchily silhouetted above the dark outline of the levee; of leisurely strolls on spring afternoons, full of infinitesimal incident. To a consciousness compounded insensibly of details such as these, the levee road is beautiful.

The first property of importance above New Orleans is Destrehan, which comes when at a given line order is set suddenly in a succession of straggly fields. There are rows of oil-tanks and then a line of small houses, evidently new but trim and tended, perpendicular to the road. Destrehan Plantation is the property of an oil company now. Beyond the workmen's houses is a stretch of sleek green lawn, cut with carefully patterned roads; a line of oak trees are in front, and there are others, ancient and flourishing, at random intervals about the place; near the house are flower-beds carefully tended and brilliant with blooms. In the midst, solid and substantial, is set the old plantation house.

"Old" seems an inapt term to apply to it, for it proclaims insistently, in every way, that it has been recently restored in every particular and it is cared for with a finished perfection, perhaps almost too finished, for it threatens to lose personality.

White in its suave background, the house is rather long and solid-looking, with an air of setting very firmly to the earth. Its first floor is basement-like, level with the ground. There is a deep porch that goes the length of the front and along two sides, with heavy plain Doric columns running the height of the two stories. Wide central doors on each floor are well-proportioned, but quite simple



DESTREHAN

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in design, without any effort for ornament. The roof, obviously new, slopes steeply out to the full width of the porch. Three dormers a bit small in proportion cut into it halfway down. The roof is dark and so are the openings, but the house itself is a gleaming, immaculate white. Closely-clipped ficus has been allowed to grow halfway up the columns and is pleasing in its effect of breaking the whiteness which seems almost too intense, especially on a warm summer day; but where it has grown completely around on the posts in front, it detracts from the height of them and makes the house seem a bit squat, though it is actually rather good in its proportions. It is a handsomely built house and the care of it is faultless, but in its present condition it somewhat lacks the flavor of age. It probably had much more true charm in its former days; it is being treated like a city house; its condition is almost too perfect, its gardens a little too groomed, so that they seem out of character, as a stalwart country squire would not show to advantage in formal garb at a dinner-party!

There are symmetrical wings on either side, which formalize the width of the building. Records show that they were added twenty years after the completion of the houses, but they were so well done, that they seem an intrinsic part of the original structure.

That vague phrase, the patine of time, acquires a real significance sometimes. There is a place several miles beyond Destrehan in which it is an essential component of a mellow quality which makes it strangely pleasing though there is nothing in particular which one could point out as being beautiful or definitely good architecturally. There is a fence of rough-hewn pickets, seasoned till the dried wood cracks and is covered with green-gray lichens. Irre-



SARPY

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

pressible weeds have sprung up in a yard that is evidently sketchily but consistently tended; and so extensive that it accommodates a number of wide-branched oaks at sunny intervals. Cherokee rose-bushes are massed in tangled, thorny green clumps by the fence and occasionally in the yard itself.

The house is all in reds and tans that must have made a brave show once; it is frankly but not at all displeasingly shabby now, with its bright colors worn to a rich harmony. It is two stories high, with wings on each side. There are porches moderately deep on both floors; on the lower one is a row of round brick piers, while the second floor makes a departure of its own in that respect and offers smaller round wooden colonnettes, quite typical, swelling just below the center and set into square blocks top and bottom. The main building is a dusty yellow, but it has red openings and the first floor of the wings is red, and red brick slave quarters are scattered through the trees.

Sarpy Plantation and the river have battled for years and the river has won, long since. It passes by now in oblivious cruelty just across the road from the beautiful old place whose sustenance of broad acres it has relentlessly devoured. The plantation house fails and decays in final defeat; but far advanced in dissolution as it is, dingy, dirty, battered, it still has an original beauty and character. Under the oaks at the side and in the back is a thick growth of weeds. Just over the gravelled highway, that passes directly in front of the house, is the roll of the levee, with its rank growth of grass burnt by the sun, holding back the destructive river; behind the house is a line of draggled-looking washing, along with a big old Chinese umbrella-tree. But there is sunshine over everything, an incessant

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

singing of mocking-birds, and the faint, heavily sweet odor of elder-flowers.

The proportions of the house are large, and it covers a great deal of ground space, but far from emphasizing that fact, all the details make for an effect of lightness and delicacy. It is interesting to see the same features that in most plantation houses of its size and pretensions are used to give the impression of massiveness and dignity, here treated to compose a consistent ensemble whose quality is lightness and grace. The house is white plaster,—in a distressing state of disrepair. A deep porch goes about all four sides of it. It is set close to the ground and is fairly long. On the ground floor, there are ten columns along the front of the porch, light round-cut bricks with a form of Doric cap, and set on square bases; on the second floor a superimposed order of slender wooden colonnettes, with long square blocks to the height of the rail. It is a big house, and there are many openings, exceptionally tall in proportion to their width. The cornice is light and the modillions or brackets used under the eaves small and flat, adding their share to the general effect of lightness. The dormers are particularly nice with their round-headed window-frames on the broad, gently sloped roof. The dormers themselves have pedimented roofs, supported on each side by delicately fluted pilasters. The ceiling of the second floor porch is finished in plain white plaster, while that of the ground floor has solid wooden beams. These are in their original state.

It is discouraging to peer inside. The amply proportioned rooms are finished in bare plaster, broken and falling. A central hall divides the house in two, and shows a handsome stairway, nicely detailed, but covered with dust. On each side a numerous and squalid "Cajin" family has taken possession. They are generally

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apathetic to visitors, but occasionally a loud call from one to the other in a throaty staccatic dialect of French is apt to startle.

From the back porch, fields of corn appear across the tops of dense weeds. Broken farm implements lie around, and a massive Creole urn of marble, weighty but handsome, stirs covetous thoughts. On either side are two old square garconnières of red brick, in a crumbling state.

Just before Sellers is a place that shows first as a brick-red thin rectangle from the road. It is set far back from a rough-pointed lichen-covered picket fence in a capacious yard with pleasant trees and shrubs. Long and low, with a porch around three sides of it, it appears a cheery, happy little place despite age and wear. The roof has a long slope, broken by a just perceptible change in slant. Curious things have been done to it in the way of dormers. The living floor walls are of white plaster, and the low basement floor is of red brick, with square brick piers supporting the deep porch. The porch has simple, pretty swelling colonnettes with square blocks at the top and bottom. Three wide openings give onto it, the center one broadened still further by side openings. The side openings are shuttered, but the doors are big and solid, nicely panelled, and suggestive of French influence.

The house next is a delightful little place, of very diminutive but pleasing proportions. It is frame, with a tiny porch and tiny square colonnettes, utterly simple, but charming. There is a gigantic oak between it and its much more imposing next-door neighbor. Oaks and walnut-trees and willows fill the large space of ground around it and quite far back in the glimmering recesses of them there is visible yet another house, still smaller.



WELHAM

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA



WELHAM

Near Laplace, through a welter of deep foliage, there comes an enlivening glimpse of red and white, the suggestion of the mass of a large house, with the broken outline of two dormers. There is a long line of rough pickets in the foreground, with corn flourishing beyond it and clumps of elder-bushes. Further along, a neatly painted red gate is set smugly into an unpainted picket fence and one has a good view of Welham plantation house. There is a great expanse of ground

with trees thick upon it and trim outhouses of whitewashed brick with red roofs scattered about on the right, little tended.

A gravelled path leads through a trim little garden to the entrance, and comes to a pleasant end under an arbor that is formed into an arch of shade of deep, sunflecked green. It is a dignified, substantial house.

The first floor, leveled with the ground, is of brick painted white, and the second floor white plaster, but on the front only. There is an imposing central entrance, a wide door with side-lights, the whole spanned by the long, low, elliptical arch of a fan-transom. The side view of the house is striking, in color and in line. It is decisively individual among Louisiana plantation houses, and delightfully so. The batten shutters are green, in contrast with the deep, rich red of the bricks. A line of low, shapely balustrade edges the roof, which rises from there in a steep slope, broken by two dormers. The top of its slant is cut by a square cupola with a balustrade that matches the ones at the base. There is something quite handsome and dignified in this crowning of the structure.



UNCLE SAM

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The back gallery is unusual. Upstairs it shows an ample porch closed in at either end by the brick walls of the house itself. The outside of the gallery is panelled glass in white woodwork and a low white frame base. On the ground floor it is entirely open, with a line of square white wooden columns "in antis" supporting the upper gallery.

In a dreary setting of rank-grown, sun-seared grass are set the handsome group of buildings that compose Uncle Sam Plantation, near Convent. There are some large oaks, off the side, others in the back, but they are few and inadequate to give grace to the grounds, which are unkempt, without flowers or shrubs, or vines—nothing but the rough stretches of ragged grass. The river has eaten into the land; on one side of the road rises the levee, on the other the houses are just a stone's throw away. Pitiful it is, for such houses as this demand generous acres, a princely avenue of oaks, and a garden in accord.

As it is, mournful, and somewhat stark, the several main buildings which make up the plantation are yet massively imposing in effect. The central house is a huge place, and the great scale of the actual building is increased by a wide gallery that runs completely around it, with giant columns through the full two stories. There are eight of these columns of brick and white stucco, immense in size, on each face of the building. The unornamented plain bell-shaped capital with the similarly plain entablature from the Corinthian order is used. The dormers are quite simple in design. So are the doorways, which are of great size, as demanded by the scale in which the place is conceived. It was painted white originally and the effect is that of an expansive, broad temple. It commands



THE BRINGIER PLACE

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respect even in its present state: the paint is dingy on the columns and has washed down to an earlier tan in spots. Little children playing in the capacious depths of the broad porch look dwarfed beside the great columns. The charming stories about the place in its earlier days are legion. Concerning the naming of the plantation it seems that when a certain young member of the family, returned from abroad with a novel and unique beard, was referred to as "Uncle Sam." Later when sugar production commenced—and this plantation was the first to export sugar—the brand was labelled "Uncle Sam" and the name stuck.

On each side of the central house, there are two auxiliary buildings, a larger one, set forward, and a smaller one, set back. The outbuildings echo on a much smaller scale the construction of the dominant building, with similar columns and pilasters, wholly charming in their expression of chaste classicism. They are only one story in height. The larger ones have six pilasters; the smaller ones, in the back, have only four and are quite charming, temple-like in their diminished but refined proportions. The outbuildings are constructed in the same spirit of simplicity as the main building, and have a beauty in themselves, while at the same time their lesser proportions exphasize the mightily greater grandeur of its lines.

A great dark rectangular patch of foliage beyond the open fields marks the Bringier Place, and that foliage is destined to remain a predominant note in any memory of the plantation. Where could a house be found that was so indissolubly of its setting? It is impossible to consider it apart from the long lines of stately trees which are in front of it and which are intrinsically part of its effect of

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beguiling informality. For the architectural scholar it possesses few, if any, features of note.

Honeysuckle vines are piled in deep masses along the fences which enclose the grounds and form a wall of green, which stops only for the entrance gate. The gate is simple with a dignity in the heavy, solid wooden posts, which are crowned with ornate old-fashioned caps. Within the honeysuckle walls are scattered low clumps of palmetto, jagged in outline, their webbed dull green tapering fingers ending in a drip of frayed brown threads.

Supreme, however, are the trees, long avenues of them, informal in effect, but stationed in definite arrangement, of oaks and magnolias, alternately, six or eight rows of them, covering a great space of ground. They are set wide apart, and the branches reach far to meet, and do meet, and effect beneath them a cool, glimmeringly luminous twilight. On a parched summer day, there is dampness beneath them and a cool, vigorous earthy smell. A few vines are allowed to climb and soften the tree-trunks, and drop down chance festoons. It is shadowy but pleasant, in the long avenues, with the dim, soothing tranquillity of some small Gothic church which has the calm without the chill of a great cathedral. In the deep shadows of the foliage, there is the occasional flash of a creamy magnolia blossom, and the larger, broad ovals of the magnolia leaves are gleaming and shiny among the foliage of the oaks.

Close to the house, there is a miniature thicket of shrubs of numerous varieties, and across the steps is an arch of vines. The house itself merges into the foliage. It is brownish in color, just a bit different and off shade a little from the trunks of the trees that lead up to it. Its lines are lost constantly in the foliage above and below



BURNSIDE

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it. It is essentially a simple place, a raised cottage, with square columns, and with a general air of dignified simplicity. There is a touch like that in the much larger house at Belle Alliance, in that a side gallery, done in cast iron, is underwoven with another, just a little lower.

A spectacular avenue of oaks and magnolias appears again at Burnside Plantation, a few miles farther along the river road from the Bringier Place, on the way to Darrow. Here the trees have altogether a different effect. There are not so many avenues of them—four altogether, and perhaps not quite so long. The branches are a little more open, and the trees are fewer, but larger, and there are some shrubs, while the house, instead of merging insensibly with the foliage, stands out dominant in imposing proportions of white.

There is none of the informality of the Bringier Place, in fact, Burnside is imposing. It is built on a magnificent scale and all its details are designed with a view to the grandiose and impressive. It is typical, in a way, with its great white columns. It is almost English in effect, and strongly reminiscent of New England and even of Charleston, notably in its formal crowning with two lines of balusters, rare here. The glassed-in watch tower is decidedly reminiscent of New England whaling ports. The porch is deep, and extends on three sides of the house, with huge white columns. The place has the good fortune, alas, too rare, of being beautifully kept and is the property of Dr. and Mrs. Miles, of New Orleans. Numerous acres of the original plantation have been sold off, but the family keeps the place for a summer residence. It is immaculate in the freshness of its white paint; the lawn is close-clipped, the shrubs trim and pruned.

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On either side of the house, there are two garconnières which are typically French, and are charming. They are hexagonal in shape, and are made of brick painted white, with green blinds.

The history of the house tallies with the suggestions contained in its construction, for its original builder came from Charleston, South Carolina. The place was built in 1840 by Colonel Preston, who was one of the most distinguished figures in the state during his time. His city residence in New Orleans was the stately building which was for many years afterwards Newcomb College, and is now the Baptist College. General Wade Hampton married his daughter and lived at Burnside for some time. A curious fact told of it is that it has always been the abode of middle-aged people. No children have been born in it, and it is only in recent years that there has been any child-life there at all.

The rooms are proportioned in the handsome scale which the imposing exterior would lead one to expect, and they are furnished quite beautifully and in period. A mass of building was added to the original structure, quite obviously: it is cruder than the rest, but interesting in character principally because of its use of an interesting arched alleyway which goes all through the building.

Some fifteen miles short of Baton Rouge, the main highway deserts the winding ways of its river comrade and goes with a modern directness straight into the town. It gains in time thereby, but loses in picturesqueness. By a short cross-road, it is possible to regain the river and a quite passable road along it, where there is little traffic, and abundance of big shade-trees, and a prevalent tranquillity.

A big house that asserts itself in a sparse group of live oaks at the

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river turning is Chatsworth Plantation. It was one of the large holdings of its time, and the name had weight. Its charm remains mainly in its traditions, however. The house is two-stories high, with deep galleries, and square columns; it is long, with wings that add to its length, its large proportions are a bit ungainly and the parts badly executed.



THE COTTAGE

A few miles farther on, a grove of live-oaks and magnolias set widely apart mark a very old house called "The Cottage" and built about the year 1830. It is quite evidently distinguished. There are shrubs beneath the trees, some in bright bloom, one sweet-olive unusually

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high, thick, and twisted with age. Flower-beds of no evident design are grown over with grass, but flaunt red blooms of salvia and starry white flowers.

In this setting is the square, substantial-looking old house. It is battered, but handsome, and its columns seem cleanly white, through the play of sun and shadow that the foliage offers. The first floor is of brick, the second of clapboard. A deep gallery runs across the



front and around on the sides, to end at the rear in small similar wings of narrow clapboard on the second floor, and brick on the first. The corners of the wings are finished with square pilasters. There are eight of the white columns across the front, of the Doric order, set on square bases; they are slightly smaller at the top and are finished with simple caps. The ample roof, of leisurely slope, is set with a line of dormers, placed rather low. They impose themselves by reason of a square-topped oddity of design. There is emphasis on the ample central doorways, which correspond on the first and

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second floors. That on the first, which is the main floor, is slightly more important: it is wide, with a fan-light and side-lights. The beam is finished with a refined moulding; there are small fluted Doric columns at the sides of the door, and small square columns at the sides of the side-lights. The doorway on the second floor has smaller side-lights, a smaller fan-light, a lighter beam, and all of its four slight columns are square. The half-windows, on either side of the central doorways, are set deep, with no frames and no shutters.

The interior plan is very simple: there is a central hall, of one width and that ample straight through. On each side of it are two large rooms, connected with each other by panelled double doors. The door facings are all panelled, and the trims are hand-turned. The doors leading to the rear gallery have curious transoms, very narrow, with little wooden bars across them, in sets of two. The walls are two feet thick, and even the interior ones are made of brick. The second floor is of brick beneath its clapboards.

There is a wide-recessed back-gallery, that has four columns across it and is brick-paved. It is closed in at the ends by the squares of the wings, which are here again finished with square pilasters. There is a down-spout head with stars that is typically early American.

The house is shabby and discolored, but the wear is superficial only. Numerous sleek white hens were scratching industriously in the sunshine, and a white horse came sociably up on the brick pavings of the back gallery. A persuasive cheeriness brightened the dilapidation that is not yet decay. Even this dilapidation is soon to be banished, for the house is the property of Mrs. Conrad Bailey, who



BELLE HELENE

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

intends shortly to restore it. It is known as the "Old Conrad Place" and has been in the possession of the same family since it was built.

There is reward for the one who crosses the ragged fields for a closer view of Belle Helene, just off the main road and not far from Baton Rouge. Even when viewed afar, from the road, it has charm, and a closer view fulfills the distant promise. It is set quite far back, and the roughness of the fields is offset by a gracious beauty of trees, happily disposed. In front, they are of a lighter variety, willows, and water oaks with leaning trunks and dainty leafage, and in the back the heavier, sturdier massing of a number of old live-oaks.

The house is large and long, beautifully constructed, but it insists rather on the theme of simplicity. The roof is particularly nice, it has a long, shallow slope to a wide heavy cornice. There are no dormers. A deep porch runs across the front and has eight round white columns supporting the heavy cornice. The effect, as in many of these houses done in the French tradition, is all that the name itself suggests, and Belle Helene has quiet stateliness and an air of refinement.

A trim modernity invests the prosperous town of Baton Rouge, but it has occasionally buildings with greater claim to interest. The old University buildings are handsome, with a massive complicity. Among them is the President's house, which was used as the residence of General Sherman until the outbreak of the Civil War. The plainness of the mass is impressive, and with this is noteworthy the severity of detail, which is carefully executed. Iron balusters, felicitously wrought, flank the granite steps and with them are wrought iron foot-scrapers; within, the stair-balusters are particularly graceful, and throughout the interior is a well-executed trim.

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

A handsome old public building of Spanish tradition that is there, though not a plantation house, is worthy of note. It has four heavy, severely simple Doric columns across the front, set on narrow square bases; long windows with very narrow trim are set deeply into thick walls, and the main stairway is on the exterior, at the end of a wide side gallery, in the manner of many of the old Louisiana houses.

The Prescott House is worthy of its name as a "show place." It was built about 1840, and during the Civil War it had arduous service as an officers' hospital. It has been remodelled since then, with some injury to its original quite charming conception. It features square columns that are flat on three sides and panelled on the front. The gallery is set just a foot or so above the ground, and wide steps lead to it. The entrance doorways are impressive on both floors, unusually tall and of proportionate width: they are as high as the very high ceilings, but are of a simplicity in keeping with the spirit of the place, which represents happily the Louisiana transition from the Colonial to the Greek Revival.

The house has remained constantly in the hands of the Prescott family and it contains treasures of old furniture and other valuable antiques which they have accumulated and cherished, notable among them a set of china that was painted by James Audubon.





ONE OF THE OLDEST HOUSES, ST. FRANCISVILLE

CHAPTER II

ST. FRANCISVILLE AND THE “FLORIDA PARISHES”

*Houses in St. Francisville, Oakley, Oak Grove, Waverly,
Rosedown, Scotts, Asphodel*



DE SOTO was buried “in the hills,” say the old records, thereby puzzling the casual reader, who thinks of Louisiana as a consistency of swamp lands and bayous and wide level stretches. However, the two parishes of East and West Feliciana rise up—literally, to claim the explorer. Their character becomes different quite suddenly. The roads, instead of running for miles on a level, dip dizzily to cross the bed of a clear stream, rise steeply and offer a panorama of rolling hills, covered with often luxuriant foliage, or cut into irregular

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patterns of cultivated fields, where cotton, corn and cane flourish. There is a reddish cast to the soil, and where random rivulets have gashed the steep banks of the streams, the earth shows brick red. The houses, the small, rare picturesque towns, and the large plantations, show with unusual consistency the grace of an old culture, only too often, unfortunately, its decay, as well. The flowers are remarkable even for Louisiana, where they are always profuse; hydrangeas attain a giant size and a clear brilliance of color; lantanas, altheas, cherokee-roses bloom extravagantly, and the azaleas are famous.

The river sweeps smoothly through the parishes. In the old days when it was the supreme path of commerce, Feliciana rose to a pinnacle of prosperity. St. Francisville, its most important settlement, was the largest port between Memphis and New Orleans. With its rich soil, the cotton output was enormous and in 1860 the parishes were assessed for more than thirty million—showing them to be the wealthiest in the state outside New Orleans. The war, the divergence of traffic, the boll-weevil, and various other causes combined have undermined its prosperity to some extent, but it retains much of its intrinsic charm. A social life flourishes there, unostentatious but gracious, founded on associations and traditions that date back to years before the war. One of the most pleasing evidences of the ancient prosperity is the fine plantation homes, which are unusually numerous and unusually handsome.

The culture of these parishes is as different in character from that typical of southern Louisiana as is the landscape, for instead of the strong French and Spanish influence that is there in evidence, here the whole atmosphere is Anglo-Saxon. For Thibodeaux, Napoleon-

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ville, Lafayette, we have St. Francisville, Jackson, Clinton; instead of Fusolliers, Castellanos, Bouanchauds, we have Howells, Matthews, Scotts, Butlers and Lawresons. It shows in speech, in traditions, and even more distinctly in the architecture; the spaciousness, the wide galleries universally characteristic of plantation houses have been adapted to houses reminiscent often of Georgian ideals, the details and mouldings often as pure and as delicate in execution as anything of the period among the much-studied examples of the Atlantic coastline. It is evidently not from France or Spain, but directly from England, that inspiration has been drawn.

It is a memorable experience to cross in the late afternoon from Pointe a-la Pont, Pointe Coupee Parish, to Bayou Sara, which is "down the hill" from St. Francisville, in the late afternoon. The names are typical—one leaves Pointe a-la Pont for Bayou Sara, Pointe Coupee for Feliciana, flat lands for high hills, French heritage for English heritage. Pointe a-la Pont is reached by a glorified cowpath on a level that follows a barren bayou. Fourdoche is a name only,—that, and a road over the levee that is a yellow gash like the dried course of a rivulet. A breathless bumping zig-zag descent lands one on a ferry that seems alarmingly inadequate. The high line of the far banks seems very far, and the river, in a quietly seething yellow flood, portentous. There is a smell of swamps in the air; a sickly green and rose sunset streaked with long lines of grey melts land and water eerily into one as the light fails. Everything becomes grey; the air is ominously cool; the stars come out small, distant, steady yellow points, without a glitter. There is the inadequate chug of the motor through the steady urge of the water which seems perilously near. And the simple act of crossing the river becomes an adventure.

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St. Francisville is perched high on the bluffs above the river. Sensible by night only as two gas-stations at intervals in a line of interesting fence-shapes with vague shadows of bowers and hedge behind, and fresh flower smells in the air, by day St. Francisville is quaint and delightful. It is mainly two streets that run along a high ledge of ground between two higher banks. There are giant trees and small houses, flowers everywhere, flame-lilies, tiger-lilies, petunias, crepe myrtles, *rosa montana* in daintily gorgeous pink festoons, great blots of pale blue plumbago. It has an air of being generally well-groomed, though it is shabby in spots. The houses are small for the most part, but they are well built; they have individuality, and a wealth of interesting details. There is "Miss Fisher's house" for instance; its side porch, dignified with square white columns and an ante-bellum Greek-revival cornice; in front there is just a bit of a porch, enough to provide setting for the handsome doorway, which is very wide, and seems wider because of side-lights and a great square transom.

There is a certain unique charm about the setting of the house of General O. D. Brooks,—himself an interesting individuality, as he has the name of having been "in every battle of the Civil War!" The house is white and set up in a green lawn that rises suavely above the road in a smooth swell and is studded with trim clumps of shrubs and beds of bright flowers—a capricious natural terrace put to happy use! One small house is quite French in character. It has four tall windows in front with double shutters unbroken in line from top to bottom; the porch has a line of slender colonnettes, turned, set on tall, square blocks, and connected by a balustrade that is particularly interesting and original, being made of a panelled face and crossed



OAKLEY

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balusters. The rather broad ends of this verandah are completely latticed.

Three miles from the main road, in self-sufficient seclusion, is Oakley, or, as it is just as often called "the Matthews Place." The road to it is picturesque—it lies through inviting stretches of virgin forest. Most beguiling is a small stream, smoothly opaque, which accompanies the road at intervals. Its banks, low but steep, are bordered with willows, and the light green foliage of



OAKLEY, ST. FRANCISVILLE

them strikes an effective note of brightness against the darker shadows of the pines and oaks. The house is not seen at once, for there is a group of trees beyond its fence, and smaller shrubs and vines make deeply impenetrable walls of leafage. There is a simple gateway and beyond it in an irregular semicircle, a sandy pathway winds towards the house. The sunlight filters through scantily, in patches startlingly bright. There are wistaria vines clambering lustily everywhere. Some of them have aspired to the high branches of the oaks, and there are ropes of them as large as an arm that slant above the walkway. All about are jagged clumps of palmetto.

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There is a tropical effect in all this growth, and at the same time a just perceptible sense of order, in the setting of the trees, in the line of the pathway.

The house expresses this spirit of dignified restraint. With no effort for pretentiousness, with no subservience to any definite style of tradition, it has achieved a character of its own by sheer sincerity and good taste. It is a large building, but compact, and gives the effect of height, in spite of the fact that it covers much ground-space. It is three stories high, above the basement. The basement, painted white, is a brick, but the rest of the structure is frame, of substantial build. There are deep porches on all the floors, with the exterior stairway that was so typical of the period. On the top two and a half stories the porches are enclosed with panelled shuttering, unique in effect, but rather charming, somehow giving an effective sense of coolness. On the far end of the first floor porch there is a stairway leading to the upper floors, a lovely thing in itself, for its niceness of detail and proportion are remarkably in keeping with the spirit of the house in simplicity of design.

The consistency of the whole place is an intrinsic element of its charm. Within as well as without, it is in character, in all its simplicity of detail. Two large rooms form the front of the house. They are entered directly from the porch, and there is no central hall. The rooms are comfortably large, but not grandiose in proportion; the doors and windows are tall and numerous and the frames of them are finished with solidity and simplicity not untouched with grace. It is curiously satisfying to note how perfectly in accord with the general tone is the furniture, of no definite period, but inevitably right. There are numerous swan chairs, a tall secrétaire,



OAK GROVE

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

substantial and well-designed; a heavy table, with a black marble top, the mahogany darkened with age, but dully shining with care.

The walls are hung with portraits from various periods, some of them excellently done. There are some portly gentlemen, and lovely girls, in toilettes that were doubtless the height of the mode of their day. The house has been in possession of the same family since its building in 1810—and even before the house, the land grant, which still exists and is dated 1770. Perhaps that fact accounts in a measure for the consistency that stamps it. It is a social landmark of the countryside and has received famous guests at times. Audubon spent some time there and left several pictures as a reminder of his stay. One of them, a curious still life of cucumbers and tomatoes, hangs there now. Two others, one of the mockingbird, which was considered as of his best work, disappeared mysteriously. The house is full of legends and anecdotes.

Its present chatelaines live there after the manner of ladies of old family on ancestral estates on the continent of Europe, and direct the destinies of the plantation. They recount anecdotes charmingly. The Civil War stories are particularly graphic; the Yankees occupied the place and the soldiery stole everything of value except some silver. The family still congratulates itself on its antecedents being clever enough to hide that under a board in the attic!

Nothing could be more perfectly descriptive of Oak Grove, by way of beginning, than its name, for it is just that, a scattered grove of oaks, on a great rising grassy slope. Such an expanse! A continental would surely call it an "estate" or at the very least a "park," a westerner might call it a prairie, for it looks like a goodly slice of one, but a Southerner is likely to speak of it largely as a "yard."

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With such space, one could either engage several landscape gardeners, and build a castle in proportion, or could simply keep it tidy, with cattle perhaps as lawn-mowers, and build upon it just such a place of sweet homey simplicity and graceful informality as is to be found there now. For an approach there is an avenue of mock-orange, the venerable branches of which interlace overhead. It climbs the slope to the house and is nearly a block in length. At that, it does not reach the house, but stops short where the grove of oak begins. The oaks are spaced quite casually, the only evidence of design being in the fact that there is an open space before the house; they seem to frame it, and one long branch extends before it.

Symmetrically placed and off to each side a bit are two octagonal dove-cotes, inspired probably by the "garconnieres" so usual with plantation houses, but smaller to suit the modest dimensions of their main houses. They are charming things,—trim white bricks, with bases a dull green and green window-trims. It is extraordinary how this slight touch of formal design affects the ensemble, holding all details, the avenue of mock-orange, the trees, the fields beyond, together to form one harmonious picture with the quaint little house in the center.



There is a distinction about this little house which is quaint without being eccentric. One speaks of it as a little house; actually it covers a sizable ground space, but its lines make for compactness, and the



WAVERLEY

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

general effect is of a long and low charming small house. There is a double slope to the roof, that is hardly perceptible, so slight is the difference in slant. It is high and the slope is very sharp; three nicely-detailed dormer windows cut into it. The second slope carries it out well beyond the porch to where an outer row of colonnettes rise to support it directly from the ground. It is a novel idea of construction, one that is noted in Mary Plantation likewise. The effect is felicitous in both cases. Here, the white colonnettes are particularly pretty, rising from low square blocks, delicately swelling and tapering towards the top, and crowned with nicely turned simple caps, the colonnettes of the outer row being more sturdily designed. The house is all brick, except where wood is used just over the porch. Everything is held to the utmost simplicity. The front of the house has four windows and three doors, set in quite without ornament, but with a sure feeling for charm of proportion. The doors have large, plain transoms over them, and all of the shutters are solid, but not heavy.

The date of the building of the house is uncertain, but it probably goes back to early in the last century. It is the property of one of the members of the Butler family, which is one of the most widely-connected and prominent of the older families in the parish, identified for years with its history and its social life.

What a variety of emotional reactions, what an accumulation of romantic tradition is bound up in these old plantation houses, if one had time to ferret them all out. They take form vaguely in the imagination, as details of the history of the places are crudely told. "Waverly" must have within its walls material for several novels as thrilling as its namesake, and its fortunes have waxed and waned and waxed again.

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Finding Waverly by night is a puzzle. You travel and re-travel the road, narrowing the zone of your quest of inquiries. At last you cross a railroad track, and follow a half-moon road until it ends under some trees. There is a fence in the offing, and lights beyond; you call, if you are wise, and in a moment a wide yellow patch cuts into the darkness, which is a hall-door; against it is etched the comfortable baggy outline of an old colored woman, black beneath the oil lamp she holds high. She comes down the path, her face in the light the dusky gleam of bronze, and her teeth glinting white in a wide smile. The lamp is part of the household illumination, for Waverly has not electric light at present. But what of that! These things are to come. The desolation it has emerged from was deep. For thirty years the house was not visible, so deep was the growth of weeds and undergrowth before it.

The original land-grant was given to one Pat McDermott, whose daughter, Emily, married a young Dr. Baines, out from England for his health. He moved to Louisiana from the Carolinas. In 1807 they built the present house, and named it "Waverly" for his home in England. It was one of the social centers of the parish. "Flying Charlie McDermott" was a brother-in-law of the doctor, and a friend of Darius Green, and in one corner of the garden there is a tree which the darkies confidently point out as the spot where he fell.

The place flourished for years; but, in the last generation, the difficulties of boll-weevil, adverse weather conditions and labor, proved too much for the owner. He held the land, but gave up the struggle for success. He lived alone in a little house designed for servants' quarters, and the main house and garden were given over to desola-

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tion and decay. At last, as a broken old man, he sold it to its present owners, the Jack Lesters. They are restoring the place with deliberation and understanding.

There is ample encouragement for such efforts, for the house and its setting is beautiful even after the years of the depredation of decay. A grove of trees stands before it, ancient cedars and oaks, placed with unobtrusive regularity, rather close together. Probably due to this close planting, the branches reach upwards and form high pointed arches, through which the house appears, charming even in its dilapidation. Weather worn, it is almost the same color as the trunks of the trees which guard it. A wide pathway, bordered with flowers, leads under the trees directly to the central steps; thriving plants in lusty bloom give a note of freshness and vigor that strikes delightfully in that atmosphere where there is so much that is time-worn and melancholy. There is the dreamily sweet odor of cape jasmine in the air, and under the trees the rough carpeting of grass-clumps is studded with lines of priceless box with tall cape jasmine in circles and diamond shapes, which evidence the plan of a formal garden.

The house has suffered badly; the upper balcony railing is not original. Blinds are in disrepair, one of the slender, simple square colonnettes is obviously decaying, and some of the crossed rails which form the balustrade are missing. But the house remains beautiful with it all. There is a certain lightness and grace in its proportions, while at the same time there is dignity and a settled quality that makes the house seem to belong to its surroundings. Two huge brick chimneys flank each side and are set far out from the house. The central doorway is particularly handsome, very pure Georgian

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in detail, excellent in design and executed with the finest workmanship. There is a multiplicity of delicate mouldings, used with the same sense of perfect compactness and restraint that characterized the work of Robert and James Adam, and it produces the same feeling of exquisite lightness and grace. The mouldings are done by hand and are finished with the most careful perfection, suggesting in advance the thoughtful delicacy and refinement that is to be discovered in the mantels and trim of the interior. It is worth study. Architects are wont to pause before it, and even to begin curiously measuring and tapping and feeling with their hands, for a better understanding of its beauty of design and workmanship. Directly above the second floor porch is a doorway almost identical with that on the first floor and of equal correctness.

The interior quite fulfills the promise that is given by the fine exterior. Toward the back of the moderately wide hall begins the stairway, noteworthy for the graceful elegance of its proportions, the exquisite detail of its slender balusters and ornamentation beneath the treads and for its mahogany rail. Elegance is a note which predominates throughout, in the proportion of the rooms, in the door-trims, in the panelled baseboards put together with wooden pegs, and in the beautiful mantelpieces. The mantels are pure Adam with an accumulation of refined mouldings, and project but slightly from the walls. They are wide and high, with tremendous openings, and evidently are still used for burning whole logs.

Upstairs, the trim that makes for the elegance of the downstairs is absent, but there are the same distinguished proportions and refinement of detail, care of workmanship and excellence of material. In one place the plaster has fallen through, revealing the staunch



ROSEDOWN

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

construction; the laths are handmade, of black walnut, and in excellent preservation.

Rosedown has a name throughout the state for its magnificence, but even at that, one is hardly prepared for the large scale and lavishness of its design. It is strongly conceived, superbly executed, tended still with appreciable care. There is a touch of awe in the spell it casts. Going slowly the length of its long entrance avenue produces somewhat the same impression as pushing open timidly the door of some great closed ball-room done, for instance, in Louis XVI gilt splendor; with the sense of beauty is mingled a little awe and the subdued conviction of impertinence.

The wide, silent driveway leads through this parklike stretch, still and quiet, through a grove of fine old trees that are set rather widely apart and back from the roadway, but with branches stretching wide enough to shadow it. The space beneath the trees is clear, and quaintly at intervals classical statues and huge old urns are set giving an effect of formal stateliness that cannot fail to suggest Versailles and the kindred handiwork of Le Notre. Back of the statues in a mass of shrubbery; the diversity of foliage gives some strikingly lovely effects. In that respect it has a luxuriousness that far surpasses Versailles. In the foreground, the green-grey moss hangs in long heavy pendants with tenuous ends, from the branches of the tall trees. The slanting afternoon sunlight picks out some in an aura of light, while others are vague grey masses in their dim background. There are pecan trees, huge of their kind, with high reaching branches and lacy leafage; the blackish trunks of many kinds of cedars; the sleek shiny artificial-looking leaves of japonicas, slender dark bay-trees, mimosa, lavender-vine, indigo, sphaera,

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acacia; leafage that is great, dark, brittle, that is feathery yellow-green, that is stiff-clustered needles, that is shiny and sleek, with delicate vines, bowed with heavy vines; shrubs and trees unfamiliar are massed together in a "plot of leafy green and shadows numberless," with happy effect. They are a background against which the statues show the dramatic gleam, and at the same time they soften the stiffness of formality in design. Successive owners of the place have been great travellers, and several continents have contributed to the garden's botanical treasures—Italy, Spain, England, Japan, South America, have all been drawn upon to produce that striking luxuriance and variety of leafage.

Across an intervening space, at the end of the avenue of trees, the great white house appears, serenely, almost coldly impressive, and intricately designed formal gardens stretch off extensively on either hand. Before it a large diamond shaped space is set off by splendid hedges, with the front lines of box and the back lines slightly higher of gloria mundi. The house has a deep high porch within a line of massive plain Greek Doric columns, the wings treated with slim flat pilasters are placed symmetrically on each side of the central portion. The cornice is heavy, very chaste. In fact, the whole front of the house is held to a plainness that is almost severity and is responsible for the suggestion of coldness in its effect. But the details are very fine. The columns, together with their round caps, are hewn from solid cypress. The central door has the usual transom and side-lights, both of which are ornamented with interesting lead-work. All the exterior details are very pure, and the proportions are grandiose. There is a large downspout head at the end of the porch, with the star and eagle in relief, that gives the typically early American touch. The windows have a very narrow trim and

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delicate shutters; fan-lights in the gable ends are shuttered in the same dainty style. The wings have a certain perfection as bits of architecture, not so cold as the front of the house, but classical, and in perfect keeping. They are like little Greek temples, fronted with a row of pretty fluted Doric columns. Behind the right wing is another wing, done in the same manner, obviously, and very successfully, an addition.

The interior of the house has innumerable treasures of old furniture, many fine pictures, bronzes, porcelains, and pieces of majolica. In point of plan the entrance hall is one of the curious architectural twists which one is liable to discover in old buildings. It is more or less hexagonal in shape, with an insignificant stairway almost directly in front of the entrance door, and somewhat crowded. The place remains in the hands of descendants of the original builders. A fire-screen that was made by Martha Washington, family portraits by Sully, and other treasures are preserved here. The furniture, like the gardens, is eloquent of the cultured discrimination and the far travels of the succeeding generations of the family.

The enduring wonder of the place is its gardens. In front of each of the wings is a semicircular space outlined by box hedges eight feet or so in height, and from the diamond-shaped space before the front of the house long alleys radiate to the far corners and in all directions, leading to all sorts of surprises—little semicircles, with a statue in the center, a nymph, a personification of winter, a cupid; one alleyway leads to what appears at first a heap of stones piled picturesquely by some happy accident, but proves to be a bridge reaching just a few inches over an infinitesimal stream which is an excuse for clusters of lush water-plants; there are big-leaved catalpas there;



ASPHODEL

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

another alleyway leads to a little arbor made of intricate, elaborate trellis-work of a lace-like perfection of detail, that suggests the Virginia manner; sweet olives are set all about it, with the hedge of box forming an outer circle beyond them. Some alleyways lead to spots which give favored glimpses down the entrance park, with its colonnaded trees, its riotous shrubs, and quaint statuary. One leads to a miniature orchard of anciently flourishing pear-trees. Another comes out before a lodge, which is quite off to the side of the main house; it is a tiny thing, but perfect, with panelled columns and carefully finished detail. There is a big old plantation bell set beside it, and a number of urns about it. There are handsome old urns everywhere, in fact.

The box hedge that walls the complex maze of pathways is sometimes as much as eight feet high. There are long banks of azalea hedges as well, that are remarkable for their height and their lusty vigor, certainly for their beauty.

At intervals, from the garden, one glimpses the great front porch, where, dwarfed in the grand proportions of it, sit the owners, an old gentleman in his deep chair, silent, looking out with unseeing eyes, his daughter near him. The wind is fresh in the trees; there is light beneath them, but no sun, and utter quiet. And the whole thing seems the fabric of a dream, a pale, slightly melancholy, splendor

There is one plantation house called "Asphodel" which is not only thoroughly charming but which is unique in point of design. Nevertheless it is perfectly indigenous to Louisiana. It is a rarely quaint building and was one of the most gratifying discoveries in our ramblings in search of old houses.

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Located vaguely some thirty-eight or forty miles above Baton Rouge and near St. Francisville, it is approached through a particularly wild stretch of virgin forest, and the road as it exists now winds up at the rear. The effect obtained on that side is of a tremendously broad reach of verandah with typical delicately swelling colonnettes supporting the wide expanse of leisurely sloping roof. The front presents a sharp contrast. Here the main body of the house emerges daintily in the center and a second story appears, as evidenced in the two graceful pedimented dormers and gable windows. The wings, with their little two-columned porticoes and classic pediments give one the same feeling as do some of the old Virginia manor houses. There is a remarkable purity as well as charm about it.

Several miles north of Baton Rouge and crowning a rise of ground that looks over a country side of similar knolls is the Scotts' Plantation. The earth is red. In the autumn its fields are full of a long grass that has a purplish cast, and sycamores flame in the evergreens of the woods, a landscape of reds and purples. In the spring and summer, there are the succulent greens, the profusion of flowering shrubs that are more typical of Louisiana.

The plantation is actually a large estate. A terra-cotta colored road leads from the main highway through woods and fields, dives under three streams, and wanders two miles before the house appears. The house stands high on the crest of its hill, a long building of deep red brick, with all stone columns fronting its deep gallery. Wide brick steps lead up to it, with deep treads that give the effect of successive small terraces. They are bordered with a brief hedge of box, fully nine feet high. On one side of the walkway is a sycamore, of tremendous spread, as symmetrical as a flower. There are pecan

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trees and several varieties of oaks at intervals about the slope of the grounds, and off to the right of the house a little fence, bordered with hedge, encloses an informal garden, containing chiefly old-fashioned roses and jasmine.

The house is detached from architectural tradition of French and Spanish Louisiana in the same way as are Asphodel and the Georgian houses of St. Francisville. This English influence must have thoroughly pervaded the territory of the Florida Parishes.

One could come across such a house in New England or even in Pennsylvania without surprise. It is a real farm house. There is a decorousness about it, a preciseness of its angles, a reserve in its coloring, principally a sober red, and without the gaiety of sharp contrast which is typical of Louisiana. The long rectangle of the main house is all brick on the first floor, but on the second the front part is of brick, and the back is finished in clapboard. The sharply sloping roof is of slate, trimmed with terra-cotta tiles at the ridges, and there is a chimney at either end. The main roof covers only the house; the deep gallery is only one story high, and has its own roof, with a slope that corresponds with that of the main roof. The tan stone columns are of the Doric order, somewhat squat; they taper slightly at the top with a moulding that only suggests a cap.

The windows, four in number, are quite simple, with green blinds and narrow plain white trim. The entranceway consists of two narrow doors like the windows. Within, there is a narrow entrance hall with big square rooms on either side of it; off the entrance hall there is a cross hall containing a stairway to the second floor, and across from the stair the entrance to the dining-room, which is in a long back wing of the house. The ceiling of the dining-room

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

has the original open beams. There are huge fireplaces, where logs burn on old andirons in the winter, and the house has some treasures of old silver and fine old furniture which show in the dimness of the interior. The kitchen, with an open fire-place of its own and an array of cranes and swinging iron arms, is of feudal dimensions.

The setting of the house has the ripe charm of maturity. There is a smell of earth-mould in the air. The box hedge beside the steps is as old as the house. Under a big oak to the side is a little hot-house sunk into the ground, built of brick and filled full of big-leaved begonias and ferns. There are shrubs all about and in the rear are some fine fig trees of immense spread.

The Scott plantation is one of the few in the state that has never ceased to function since its building, which was in 1808. It is still in busy operation under the direction of two women who are descendants of its original builder. It is redolent of thorough-going healthy life. The far fields are dotted with sheep and there are sleek jersey cows far and near. Down a slope back of the house are long cattle sheds, with negroes shuffling about busy in their own leisurely way.

There are animals everywhere, dogs and innumerable cats, chickens, pea-fowl, and turkeys. There is a low, humming mélange of animal noises, the vigorous pulsing of numerous homely existences, that substantiates oddly the prim reserve of the old house.





CHAPTER III

ALONG THE WEST BANK OF THE MISSISSIPPI

*Seven Oaks, Pierce, Valcour, Aimes, Oak Alley,
Belle Grove, Llanfair, Parlange*



It is surprising to see the masts of a ship suddenly, stiff, slender and straight, in among the graceful irregularity of willows. That is one of the happenings of crossing the river at New Orleans.

The street takes a turn at right angles, so that it seems to end in the long, low green swell of the levee, with its feathery crowning of willows. From the lower level of the street, there is no glimpse of the river itself, and the rigging of the ship seems set incongruously on dry land. Sometimes there are several ships, one after the other, some with low, squat funnels, and a thread of wireless apparatus. Some with many tall masts and a cobweb lace-work of rigging.

An efficient little ferry chugs across, impertinent in the face of the onrush of the sweeping yellow flood of the river. The current is so strong that the boat has to go well upstream so that it can be

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carried back to the landing. There is a stirring view of the docks, lined, till the river bend cuts the view, with endless shipping, ocean liners, freighters, farther down; nearer at hand, a whole fleet of ships, some twelve or fifteen of them, drawn up for repairs, their black iron hulls and white stacks making a striking design. On the city side is a line of ancient schooners, four masters, and a huge six-master, calling up echoes of old sea-romances with their lines of sinewy power. Beyond the water line, the city stretches in a panorama of numberless roofs to the far bulk of sky-scrappers, and a light river haze softens and brightens it all. On the other side of the river, directly across, jagged angles just above the levee are the roofs of unambitious little houses, but farther, down to the left, across the shipping, are factories and larger houses and small cities, outgrowths from the larger one across the river.

At the ferry-landing, a turn to the right leads towards the open country. The river has given way to the speedier roads of the land as thoroughfare, but still it points the way, and the gravelled highways follow its banks on both sides, in all their tortuous windings, which are maddeningly sharp and numerous to the motorist. The west bank, like the east bank, has its relics of the régime of plantation aristocracy, fine houses miles apart, a few well-cared-for, and some in pitiful desolation, some vanished altogether, leaving not a wrack behind, save current tales half legendary, of former splendors and extravagances and richly fantastic anecdotes, which are heritages of the old families of the state. There are occasional old oaks that are imposing in their size and grouping, and sometimes in the grotesque knobs of their trunks and heavy gnarled roots. The fields show bright spots of color, often, where the negroes work, in non-descript garments of bright tones tempered by wear! A thicker

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clustering of small houses by the road marks a town; there are a few progressive, prosperous little cities, and many churches. A rare piece of luck is to find a negro church where a service is in progress: "dull would he be of soul that would pass by": there is nothing quite like the ardently marked abandon of their rhythms and accentings, the rich nasal, almost whining sweetness of the cadences, that have at once a touch of pathos and the pulse of a dance. For miles the levee is etched cleanly against a pale sky at one side of the road, and offers an endless variety of silhouettes;—a boy swaying contentedly to the ambling of an aged mule, negro women, swinging along single file in easy motion, with bundles on their heads; little groups of two or three negro workmen (so-called!), sprawled in a coma of contentment in the sun, or pickaninnies playing; an old negro woman with a corn-cob pipe in a shapeless dent of a mouth. Negroes lounge indolently, too, on the galleries of small houses by the road, five, six, seven, any number of them on the gallery of a two-room shack, perhaps entranced in idleness, as though their sitting there were a piece of a pleasant eternity of the same thing.

A mile or so down the road from the ferry-landing is a squat, sparse forest of oil-tanks, huge, low, round and black: they look like ungainly inhabitants of Oz. The fields are bare between them, and it is an outlook of bleak unsightliness. Helpless against this artificial ugliness is the natural beauty of seven magnificent oaks, grouped together, which appear surprisingly in the midst of it. They give





SEVEN OAKS

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES II

their name to the plantation house before they stand, "Seven Oaks." It is a great square, solid-looking place, suggesting substantial worth and large ways of comfortable living. It offers a vista of white columns, proud in the simplicity of their design, a simple Doric, with narrow cap, and in the grandeur of the scale in which they are conceived. They are amply spaced as their generous proportions demand, with eight on the front and back, and seven on the sides. Deep, high galleries run completely around the house, the one on the first floor level with the ground. On the second floor, a simple balustrade of plain, substantial wooden balusters with a heavy handrail connects the columns. There is not a touch of exuberance anywhere: every detail is executed with dignity and restraint, with a consistency which gives the old house the charm of definite personality. The window-frames are large, and so are the doorways, large, simple, and frankly heavy in detail. A heavy watch-tower is the only note out of harmony and was probably a late addition to the original structure. It detracts only slightly and the general impression of Seven Oaks is hardly the less striking. It is eloquent of the traditions of plantation architecture, of plantation days: the size of it, the simplicity of it, the good taste that governs its proportions, the play of shadows on the whiteness of it; the oaks that are its attendants speak perfectly the spirit of their period, call up vistas of wide fields under cultivation, of toiling swarms of negro slaves, of brilliant entertainment. The picture is a true one, for the place was built originally by M. Lucien La Branche, one of the richest planters of his time, member of a prominently connected family, others of whom had plantations as impressive. Seven Oaks was famous for its prosperity and for its hospitality.

The little towns that sprawl occasionally behind the levee are com-

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posed chiefly of nondescript shacks or small, unpretentious homes; with only rarely anything of interest, such as, for instance, a doorway that could not be forgotten. It was handsome in itself, heavy, and panelled, set in a massive frame, and topped with a fine elliptical fan-light: it was painted brick red and formed about a third of the front of a board shack into which it had been set!

Near Luling, in the haphazard, rather ragged looking landscape there appears suddenly an island of trim, luxuriant greens, which mark "Illington." The house has an unpretentious charm of its own, as it is glimpsed very white in irregular patterns cut by the wealth of foliage before it. There is a pretty Italian stairway with a graceful curve that leads to the center of the deep gallery of the second floor. The main entrance is on this floor, an arrangement that gives dignity and reserve to the house. This modest dignity, which is the most the house pretends to, is emphasized by a nicely-proportioned cornice, Greek in character, and by a balustrade, somewhat heavy, covering it. The first floor is level with the ground, and is done in rusticated stucco; the second floor is clap-boarded. In general, the effect of the house is unassuming but felicitous; it gives an impression of pleasant, domestic informality expressed prettily but substantially, and in unflinching good taste.

A significant feature of the place is the foliage which fronts it, frames it, and serves as a background for it. Trees and shrubs, ever-greens and hedges, have been used so that they have an effectiveness that is almost Italian and an informality that is purely American. A line of trim, white picket-fence encloses the whole place; beyond it is a narrow strip of well-kept grassy lawn, bordered on the far side by a low green hedge that is clipped roughly square. Over

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the hedge is a striking interplay of foliage, pale green, bright green, yellow green of fresh dainty leaves delicately limned against the rich blacks of evergreens. The lighter shrubs are graduated unobtrusively in size to the darker ones behind them, and culminate in the background in the dull foliage of oaks. The only break is the massing of green by the walkway which ends in the high Italian stairway; and the house, in its frame of green, gleams coolly, almost spectacularly white through the outlines of contrasting greens before it.

Imagination must play a large part in getting any idea of the old Valcour Aimes place, and a sharp eyesight is necessary in order to find it. There is a long line of old oaks at right angles to the road—the most imposing of several such lines, and it by that description that one must know it. It leads on for half a mile or so, and there is an open space, a tangled green stretch, picturesquely desolate. Rare shrubs are there, overgrown with rank vines and crowded with common weeds, but one can discover, with care and with disregard of the scratches of brambles, the outlines of what was once an elaborate, extensive garden, traced in the formal lines dear to Le Notre the Frenchman and his kind, with traces of arbors, scraps of what were planned evidently as “charmilles” and even the cluttered remnant of a grotto. This is all that remains of the plantation house that was considered one of the handsomest of its kind; but the ornate elaborateness of the garden as shown in the traces of its design was evidently typical of the house, a surmise that is strengthened by what descriptions of it remain. It was called “The Little Versailles,” and was apparently everything that the title implies in lavishness and ornateness of construction. It was built at the height of plantation prosperity and abandoned the simplicity of earlier days for elabo-



OAK ALLEY

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rate decorativeness, yet preserved the care for detail and for the fineness of material used. Louis Philippe of France was entertained here at one of the famous banquets when five dollar bills were used as cigar lighters.

A few miles farther along the river road is Oak Alley. No directions or descriptions are necessary for finding it: it would be impossible to pass it by. An avenue of thirty magnificent oaks stands before the house and gives it its inadequate name. Such trees it would be hard to equal anywhere in the world; each one is a giant of its kind and, though they are set far apart, the huge, gnarled branches reach out and meet, forming a long, twilight, silent avenue, at the end of which is framed, almost unreal in the long perspective, the white mass of the house. It is a huge structure, but it seems cozy at the end of that great vista; it is set level with the ground, with wide galleries all around it, and columns running the height of the two high stories. The columns are plain Greek Doric in design, but splendid for their size and proportion and simplicity; massive as they are, in relation to the succession of great trees before them, they acquire a certain daintiness. The huge oaks have not a vestige of Spanish moss upon them—a circumstance that is most unusual—the lower branches are high above the ground and seem almost as level as though they had been expressly trimmed, so that they frame the house magnificently.

Quite different from the approach to Oak Alley is the sorry entrance to Belle Grove. It is a few miles on the New Orleans side of White Castle, and, without explicit directions, or even guidance, one could never find it. There is a long line of fence made of horizontal boards, fronting a soggy field. A big sagging gate lets into it, and



BELLE GROVE

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gives onto the semblance of a road through the field, towards a rough mass of shrubs in the back, which detract from the beauty of a fine grove of oaks beyond them.

The scene leaves expectation sluggish, and when one rounds the line of shrubs, Belle Grove is a sudden, startling revelation. It is a huge place, built in a sophisticated spirit, with a frank love of ornamentation in all the complexity of its detail, yet with good taste informing its lavishness. It is commandingly beautiful in its general effect; the house is worn, warm pink, corroded in spots to lavender with elaborated Corinthian columns the height of the two stories fronting its deep front gallery. There is an inner balcony above with a wrought iron railing, and broad white marble steps leading up to the gallery. There is a clustering of green vines and palmettos before it, and oak trees on all sides, with heavy pendants of gray-green Spanish moss, and the cloudy pink of crepe myrtles beneath them, the sunlight prettily patterned through the foliage and warming the rich pink of the house itself.

The richness of ornamentation and elaborateness of detail are carried out in proportions that are imposingly grandiose, yet executed with infinite care and perfectly amazing delicacy. At the left of the front gallery, with its line of magnificently ornate Corinthian columns, there is a round wing, with the remnant of a balcony about it, and elaborate brackets. On the right is a side portico overlooking a garden; beyond these a succession of wings, apparently endless. The capitals of the Corinthian columns are enormous, as the proportions of the columns demand; they are carved with vigor and zest, with minute perforations, and are made from solid blocks of cypress. At each end of the front gallery are pilasters, with capitals similarly

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carved. There is handsome panelling everywhere under the galleries, long, graceful brackets of cypress carved by hand in scroll design, supporting the upper balcony: a lavish richness of carvings on the capitals of the front and side porticos, over the window-heads, under the side gallery; in fact, every part of the house has been touched with ornamentation on a grand scale but so proportioned that it seems to have a lace-like delicacy, and all the richness, the profuseness and elaborateness of detail has been held together, in one harmony of luxuriant opulence expressed with restraint and a feeling for beauty.

The spirit of Greek Revival at a sophisticated stage is abundantly evident, infused with a suggestion of the Empire. One original, distinctive expression of it is in a row of little attic windows along the side, which, in their placing and their proportion, hark back obviously and quite charmingly to the idea of a frieze. The proportions of the house are purely Greek.

The big portico on the right of the house is particularly interesting. Its elaborate columns have the same rich carving which is everywhere in evidence, and its proportions, large in themselves, are yet subordinated to the largeness of the main house. A feature characteristic of it is the treatment of the basement, which is like a story under the gallery proper; there is a row of small windows in it on either side of the steps, with flattened rusticated arches that are unobtrusive but charming in effect. The portico has its own garden, which has fallen into decay, but must once have been a place of dreamy loveliness. It is pretty even now, with its crepe myrtles and oleanders flowering still in the desolation.

The desolation which prevails on the outside of the house is found

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in even greater degree within, but beauty is there just as notably, and in as magnificent a guise. The rooms and the great hallways would do credit to a palace in the grandeur of their scale and the elegance of their proportions. The details are carried out with all the elaborate perfection and in the spirit which the exterior would lead us to expect. The doors are Greek in conception, handsomely panelled. The great length of the tremendous hallway is broken with ornate pilasters set at regular intervals along the walls, matched with two columns in the larger square space into which the hall expands in the back, while behind the columns, in the end wall of the hallway, are two more pilasters which complete the row of them. From the back hallway, a great stairway with a particularly nice handrail, winds to the second floor with the slow upward sweep which the great height of the ceiling affords. Most of the rooms have huge black marble mantles, handsomely designed. There are fine plaster ceilings, Empire in detail, and vistas of large rooms at every turn. A window in the stairway gives a glimpse towards the back of the house, and a bright bit of color where two old blue cisterns are set in an angle of one of the many wings, charming against the rusty pink of them.

The second floor is as handsome and only slightly less ornate than the first, with a number of big bedrooms in the average modern house. Decay has made its greatest headway here, and plaster is falling, the wood-work battered and discolored in places, but still splendidly solid. There are old bottles and scraps of food about, and a bright little barefoot boy who shows the place and talks with a marked French accent.

The attic is one tremendous room and is mainly interesting for struc-

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tural ideas. The great chimneys here are arched to join and emerge at the proper point on the roof. From it one can go out onto the top of the side porticos and have a view of the sweep of land about it, that seems succulently rich, and of the russet curves of the river beyond. And one can have from there, too, a close inspection of the giant capitals of the Corinthian columns, which gain if anything on the near view: they are six feet high at least, and the solidity of the wood from which they are made and the freshness of the carving are astounding.

The house is remarkable and rare. It is pure in its type, grandiose in the immensity of its proportions and the elaborateness of its detail, colorful, with the deep glow of its pink stucco. It is profoundly artificial and sophisticated, with an air of hauteur, secure in a proud beauty, intricate, complex, but harmonious.

Belle Grove tells its tale in its structure. It was built in the exuberant, brilliant days of the period just previous to the Civil War, in 1857, by the wealthy John Andrews, then just recently come from Virginia. It was the center of lavish entertainments. Even after the war, and in fact until comparatively recent times, it maintained a hospitality worthy of it, when it was the home of the Wares. Mr. Ware's dinners were famous for the cuisine and for the setting and for the beauty of the service. There was furniture brought from Italy and France, and some from England, enough to furnish richly all the magnificent rooms. Everything was scattered, furniture, silver, glassware and china, at an auction sale some years back. The house itself seemed doomed; it was bought recently in the newly roused interest in plantations, and there is promise of its restoration.

The complete vicinity of White Castle seems to have held a charm

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for sophisticated builders, for Llanfair, which lies just beyond it, while very different from Belle Grove, is elaborate in its own way. It is strikingly effective as it comes into view after a turn in the road. The fields give way to a smooth swath of green lawn, trimly kept. On either side there is a long, irregular line of trees, oaks and magnolias, with heavy masses of contrasting foliage. The lines are too irregularly formed and too far apart to suggest an avenue, yet there is a design in their arrangement with a certain charm in the informality of it.

It is this house which actually gave the name to the little town of White Castle; for when it was built in 1858, it was considered so fine that a booklet was written, describing it in the elaborate phraseology of the times, under the title of "The White Castle of Louisiana." It was built by John Hampton Randolph of Virginia, and was named in time Nottaway; later it came into the hands of the Owen family, and the house is still the country residence of Dr. W. G. Owen of Iberville Parish, though the greater part of the land was then sold off. The Owens rechristened it Llanfair, as it is now known.

Whiteness and height and a certain elaborateness of detail are the striking features of it. It has a low basement, of rusticated stucco, brilliant white, with small, barred windows, slightly rounded at the top. The outer edge of the gallery is even with the basement wall, and along the front of it are ranged tall, light square columns which run the full two stories of the house. There is a large, rounded wing at the right with similar columns, and at the center of the front a rectangular projection, with two columns at each end of it, ranged in pairs, while on the main gallery there are three columns on each

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side of the projection. The break in arrangement, by the rounding line of the columns of the wing, gives an effect that is strikingly more elaborate than that produced by regularity—a forest of the columns, as it were.

There are pilasters with square caps like those of the columns at each end of the main house, and there are deep galleries on the first and second floors, with cast iron railings heavily elaborate. The big central doorway is massively ornate, illegitimate Greek, perhaps, though really with no positive derivative. The windows on the two living floors are tall and dignified. The parapet is distinctly Greek, heavy, in keeping with the wide entablature. The entablature is impure in style, with an attempt at originality in being broken in line with the columns by slight, flat protuberances roughly rectangular; evidently, the purpose of them was to carry on the effect of height of the columns, but actually they impair the distinction of the entablature. The dignity of the upper structure is enhanced by a heavy cornice. There is a series of brackets, ranged alternately in pairs and singly in spite of the massiveness of them, they suggest an early beginning of the jig-saw which was later to become so deplorable; and which is evidently matched near at hand in a wing at the left of the house. This wing was added in the late 80's, and follows the unhappy devices of its times, including the jig-saw in question. It takes from the really felicitous main house only the pretty and unusual basement structure, and otherwise has gone off on an unfortunate tangent of its own, with a row of one-story small square columns, and a roofless upper balcony.

An unusually delightful Italian renaissance stairway is one of the charming features of the main house. It rounds out in a graceful

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sweep from each side of the central projection of the main house, and has a niche and delicate railings of wrought iron, which make a pretty design, etched against the gleaming white of the rusticated stucco of the basement.

The interior of the house is impressive. The rooms are imposing in size, and the fine plaster of the original building still remains in perfect preservation. The mantels are particularly handsome, all of them made either of Italian Carrara, or black Austrian, marble. The most striking room is the White Ball Room, which is true to its name in every least particular; everything in it is white, dead dull white, gleaming white, but always white—a white marble mantel, elaborate crystal chandeliers, delicately carved white Corinthian columns, white doorways and window frames, and even white tiled flooring.

The white house through the trees is a cheery place. It has an atmosphere of suavity and ornate elegance, and it is a joy to find it well tended and preserved with sympathetic understanding and good taste, when so many other beautiful houses are being left to crumble to ruin.

Ten miles or so above Baton Rouge and near Port Allen, facing the River, was the house on the plantation called Bel Air. The river has only recently claimed this fine old building, and what was the site is now Mississippi River bottom. The date of the building of the house is somewhat uncertain, probably about 1812 to 1820, though 1841 is the date which marks its coming into possession of the Von Phul family, its present inheritors. A bride, who was Kitty Stewart, received it at that time as a wedding gift from her father. As a plantation type, Bel Air is remarkable for its extreme simplicity and



PARLANGE

Dr. L. S.

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genuineness—true of Louisiana in character. The doorways are of great proportions and of exquisite detail. These and the mantels, also very good, have been preserved for a later rebuilding of the homestead.

False River, in Pointe Coupee Parish, was anciently an arm of the Mississippi. Cut off, it is an entity unique, with the dreamy peace of the bayous, their oaks and water hyacinths and willows, with a lake-like breadth of water that follows the changing whims of the sky, a sullen gray, a chaste expanse of shining silver, and ecstasy of sunset colors. Here, remote in a grove of immemorial oaks, is set the Parlange house.

A small place it seems, dwarfed by the gigantic oaks of its setting, belittled by the sharp slopes of its high roof, deprecating in the utter and consistent simplicity of its conception any suggestion of impressiveness. Actually, it is a commodious house, that has been informed with a feeling of intimacy expressed with rare grace and refinement, even elegance. An unerring good taste and, too, perhaps, the white octagonal dovecotes which flank it on the sides, harking back to the favorite garconnieres, assure dignity for all its deliberate unpretentiousness. It was built by the Ternands and came in direct line to the Parlanges, and is as French in spirit as the names of its owners.

It is white plaster on brick above, white brick below, sweet in the musty dimness of its setting. A line of doors, five of them, break the front expanse of wall. The only openings in it: they are all of equal size, with solid blinds painted green that cut a design of nice simplicity into the white of the walls. There are narrow rectangular transoms decorated with a flattened ellipse and radiating ribs in wood. The basement floor is high, with doors not quite so high

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as those of the first floor. A gallery surrounds the house, with numerous columns delicate in design: on the first floor, they are of brick, covered with stucco, tapering; wooden colonnettes correspond to them above, which rise rounded and tapering from long square bases and finish in short square caps.

Informality dominates everywhere. The doors in front are placed asymmetrically with regard to the arrangement of the columns; in the rear, the body of the house is deepened on one side to form a dining-room, leaving the other three-quarters of the rear with a double-width gallery that has an inner row of colonnettes in a line with the back dining room wall and similar to the outer line.

With the prevalent informality is combined in a way which is perhaps typically Gallic a finish and perfection of detail that is really exquisite, a love of minute refinement that is jewel-like yet is held to an ultimate effect of refined simplicity. The whole house is of hand-hewn and mortised construction, which was the usual method of its time. Here, however, there is an ornamentation that is rare in its richness and in its reserve. The door-frames are hand-turned, with numbers of very fine mouldings, the ceilings of the rooms are of cypress, so perfectly fitted that it needs a second glance to see that the white surface is not plaster; they are finished at the edge with a three-inch trim of fine mouldings alternating with diamond-shaped designs in such low relief that the ornamentation does not stand out as a bit of elaborateness, but merely softens the general effect. Ornamentation of this or of similar kind is in all the rooms, and even the panelling of the gallery ceiling has a finish of fine moulding. The chimney places are unusual, similar to some to be found in the Vieux Carré of New Orleans, but even more graceful in design; a rather

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narrow brick chimney is built out into the room, and a wooden mantel follows the three faces of it. Here, the mantels are high and are finished with very refined mouldings.

The house was built over a hundred and sixty-five years ago, according to its present owner, Mr. Walter Parlange, which places it just after the middle of the 18th century. It has treasures of old furniture, and quaint pieces among them, a spinet, a spinning wheel, tall, slender brass "grease-lamps," much slave-made iron including a number of slave-manacles, iron andirons, iron cooking-utensils, an absorbingly interesting collection of such articles.

The Bachelder Place, Lakeside, so-called because of the lake-like Old River before it, is a more modern structure than its neighbors and more sophisticated, though it is of pre-Civil War construction and holds in general to plantation convictions, in its brick basement floor and plaster main floor, and its encircling wide galleries. The basement is very high, however, with raised wooden flooring, and is used as living quarters, though the second is the main floor. There is a liberal use of cast-iron, even more so than at Belle Alliance, on Bayou Lafourche. The rails and columns are all of cast-iron and even the treads of the broad, high, central stairway are of ornate iron construction. The oaks are exceptionally fine.

Old River is another discarded branch of the Mississippi and has some delightful houses along its peaceful banks that are evidently of great age: Pointe Coupee Parish was one of the oldest and most thickly populous of the settlements in the state. The French spirit is very strongly in evidence, sometimes an urban, sometimes a rural expression of it. The old Labatut House remains picturesque, with a haunting feeling of the rural French about it, a kinship, vague

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enough, with Madame John's Legacy of New Orleans. It is a little yellow house, with adobe-like stucco on the bricks of the simply tapering rounded columns that front its basement floor; there are quite simple rounded wooden colonnettes on the second floor, and the main stairway is at one end of the front gallery. It is much a house as would seem quite in its place in any field in France. Formerly, there was a grove of oaks before it, and a little attendant village, Picayuneville, but all of that has vanished into the river long since.

Farther along the road is a giant for even the mighty oaks of this section, it is reputed the largest in Louisiana, and is said to cover with its far-drooping sweep of branches the space of an acre, and certainly it seems to. The trunk itself is eleven feet in diameter.





CHAPTER IV

ALONG BAYOU LAFOURCHE

*Rienzi, Woodlawn, Maidwood, Belle Alliance.
Ducros, Leighton*



BAYOU LAFOURCHE is a true pulse of the old South, steady and languorous. For a few short weeks in the spring, whipped by rains, it hurries; but the rest of the year, it takes a peaceful unhurried way. Early in its course, it is level with its banks, a dark, idle, pleasant stream; later, it is often out of sight between high banks, made higher with levees; then what is on the other side remains a mild mystery, to be guessed at only by scraps of tiny roof peaks or sometimes the half of a more pretentious house.

It was one of the roads of commerce where some of the earliest plantation makers found their way, and left handsomely built houses as

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a testimonial of their success. A mild prosperity is still in evidence, in miles of cultivated fields, in trim, fresh new houses, and in occasional vigorous little towns. But it is an inoffensive prosperity, with nothing new or crude or raw about it: it has been a slow growth, a development of the old life and culture, which it has supplanted, but not destroyed, and its new vigor often wears the grace of its old, ripe beauty, sometimes deliberately, more often unconsciously.

The Lafourche Country Club, for instance, wiser than most communities, has taken for itself an old, roomy, antebellum house, unpretentious but charming, set back in a thick grove of trees, delightful and typical.

All along the road, there are charming small houses obviously dating back to pre-war days, built in the old spirit of substantial simplicity, with deep galleries, simple columns and wide doorways with side-lights. And beside the gravelled highway, where motors speed all day, appear antiquated craft, flat-bottomed old skiffs, ancient motor-boats, or sometimes even a stern-wheeler still in use. A freshly-painted modern house of hybrid derivation may be succeeded at the next turn of the road by a group of ancient slave-quarters, set back cosily under old trees, in a sweet-smelling thicket of elder-berries. They are tiny in size, grouped close together, and built with the utmost simplicity, but substantially: they make snug living-quarters for the descendants of their original occupants, who are usually in evidence somewhere about, engaged in leisurely work or lounging in untroubled ease.

Old oaks, always the same old oaks, yet always different, with their long, twisted branches and their drooping grey moss, are the setting for Rienzi Plantation. There is no shrubbery, no flowers, no under-



RIENZI

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

growth; but the oaks, with their high arched branches, form a heavy frame, suitable for the crude, spacious Rienzi Plantation house. The plainness of the roof which has no dormers, and, with its gables at the side of the house, reaches out in a shallow slope clear over the wide galleries; the grace of a central exterior stairway, with its double curve in the Italian manner, the strangeness of the enormously wide doors, and the warm color of its red brick stamp the character of Rienzi. It is two stories; the first floor is set level with the ground and is of a height which gives full play to the entrance stairway, which descends outward to a landing halfway up, and then sweeps in again in a charming curve, framing the first floor doorway.

The broad, rather squat doorway of the second floor is curious, vaguely Greek and rather archaic in character. The inspiration was Greek, with the broad jambs heavily battened, the dog-eared lintel slightly peaked at the center and the resultant broad expanse of border decorated solely with white curious little moulded diamond shapes spaced at intervals, and remindful of the classic rosette. The large door is set with ample side-lights and a broad transom within this heavy Greek frame. The first story entrance is interesting too and possibly more original in point of design, with its round-arched doorhead and side-lights giving the effect of a palladian feature which the broad expanse of white with its crude effect of Greek detail promptly denies.

There is a pleasing play of white against the old red bricks of the main house. The narrow window-jambs are white, as are the doorways and columns. On the first floor, there is a row of tall, massive white brick piers, while on the second floor are smaller, square white wooden colonnettes, with simple square caps. The ceilings of the



WOODLAWN

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

gallery are beamed. There is a crown mould which bellies out above a plain cornice, and a dentil course that is like so many small brackets. The windows are narrow, the more emphatically because of the unusual breadth of the doorway. The wide galleries run on all four sides of the house.

The interior is designed with a crude generosity which is quite in keeping with the exterior. Rooms of large proportions give onto two enormous cross-halls, and in places part of the hallway arms have been cut off to form additional rooms. There are huge flat mantels, big, heavy doorways through thick walls, and a general impression of substantial massiveness.

There are red brick outbuildings scattered under big trees, and a murmur of farm noises, woven to a pleasant hum by distance. The crude, substantial beauty of Rienzi seems established in a safe, if not brilliant prosperity.

Unfortunately, the beautiful house was not quite so safe as it seemed; for a visit only three months after this writing showed it mutilated by the loss of its beautiful Italian stairway.

All the grace that foliage can give, low clumps of it, bowers of it, high, deep shadowy masses of it, goes to form a worthy setting for the sturdy, aged beauty of Woodlawn, the Munson place beyond Thibodeaux. From a deep bower of green the time-stained white house rises in gracious dignity.

There are four tall Ionic columns across the center of the front with at each end proportionately massive piers and pilasters handsomely panelled. An entablature, fully a third the height of the columns,

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adds to the effect of weighty dignity. Over this is a parapet, more in keeping with the spirit of Greek revival than of the original Greek. It is stepped slightly, to attain the greatest height in the center of the façade, so that it marks the accent strongly there.

The main house is a worn white, with green shutters, and green handrails on the first and second floor galleries. There are similar wings at each end, of discolored pink stucco, with green shutters. On the galleries of the main house, there is a daintily substantial balustrade in a diamond-shaped design. The main doorway is on the first floor, which is level with the ground. It is simple, rather heavy, and has well-proportioned side-lights. Its great width seems moderate in the grandiose proportions of the house, and in the thickness of the front wall, which is at least eighteen inches through.

The wings are charming: they are lower than the house, only one-story high, and are prettily gabled and there is a brief passage that connects them with the main house. Their length runs parallel to the body of the house and they are just a bit longer than its width, reaching out their gabled ends quaintly a bit beyond it in the rear. Square pilasters of each corner of them give a dignity and solidity, and echo the proportions of the square columns on the galleries of the main building; and that fact, together with the symmetry of the wings, ties them in as more delicate elements in a harmonious whole that is marked with unusual beauty; there is a dignity of proportion throughout that is pervaded at the same time with charm and a sense of comfort.

All sorts of delightful individualities, almost too numerous and often too insignificant to mention, supplement the fundamental elements of proportion and beauty of detail in making the charm of

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Woodlawn. There is, for instance, the great clump of elephant-ears, which fills in at one end in front, the whole space between the wing and the main house, and is balanced, by chance, apparently, on the other end by a pretty, squat crepe myrtle; there is the thick green line of vine that has drawn itself in a long rope the whole length of the roof of one wing. Three little attic windows grouped together in the weather-stained gable above the cornice, on the side of the main house, prove somehow pleasantly surprising.

The interior is heavy and dignified, and without the distinction which marks the exterior. The big central doorway opens into a square hallway just a little wider than itself, which opens in turn through a heavy door into a narrower hallway. To the right of the rear door, an unimportant stairway leads to the second floor. The house is only two rooms deep—the front ones connect with the entrance hall by plain, heavy doors, that show the thickness of the inner walls nearly as great as that of the outer walls. There is nice plaster work inside, and white marble mantels. At the end of the narrow back hall is a small, quaint green door, that opens onto the deep back gallery, and thence down a long vista under a high, closed green arch of shrubs, with a pretty little rustic gate at the end, and a glimpse of a rose-garden beyond.

On the back there is a deep recessed porch, with square columns along it and a small outside stairway, at one end; and on each end is a little square room, brick below, wood above. Beyond on either side extend the square, gabled ends of the wings, and all these various elements, simple in themselves and harmonious with each other, give a beguiling feeling of complexity. It is all softly colorful, worn by time into harmony. The main house is a mellowed white, stained



MAIDWOOD

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in one place by fire apparently, the wings are a worn pink, and in between one wing and the end of the recessed porch is an old blue-green cistern, while beyond are the innumerable greens of the various shrubs. Spring and summer have the added brilliance of the soft pink clouds of crepe myrtle, and the waxy white of oleanders and magnolias. And almost the whole year through the air has a faint fragrance of sweet-olive.

"Woodlawn" continues in its beautiful tranquillity its original mission as plantation house, belonging to the Munson family. It was built by a Mr. Pugh, according to reports, about eighty years ago.

Just a few miles beyond Woodlawn appears Maidwood, very white and fresh and imposing. It invites comparison with Woodlawn because of a certain similarity: in its impressive use, for instance, of Ionic columns and because like Woodlawn it has two symmetrical wings. But the two places are totally different in character, aside from the superficial difference that Maidwood is maintained in immaculate, gleaming white freshness, while Woodlawn shows the soft, deep stains of years. Maidwood is a trifle ornate, more sophisticated, notably handsome, but perhaps slightly less charming. Its length and its gable ends are front and back, instead of from side to side, as at Woodlawn. It is set just slightly above the ground with a low slope of terrace to the first floor gallery. There are six splendidly massive Ionic columns across the front, over them being a heavy entablature of classic simplicity. Its width, taken with the pointed gabled end of the roof above it, gives the house an effect of height, while maintaining the tone of substantial dignity which is set by the massive columns. There is a large fan-shaped opening in the front gable end: its delicate shuttering is painted a deep green, and

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stands out vividly in the gleaming white of the house, a bit of ornamentation quite in character.

All the house is a fresh white, against which the green of the window blinds stands out sharply. There is an inner balcony on the second floor, with an ornamental balustrade of delicate, crossed wooden balusters, white, with a green handrail. Heavy square pilasters are set at each end of the gallery.

The wings are wholly subordinated to the main house—much more so than at Woodlawn. They simply repeat the main house on a smaller scale, and are placed quite similarly to it, but far back; and across the front, instead of the row of Ionic columns, there are prettily proportioned flat pilasters, and the idea repeated between windows on the side, enhancing the effect of simple dignity.

The interior is very fine, with much detail executed in the best spirit of the Greek Revival. There is a broad hallway, with large openings on either side in the center, flanked with classic columns, and smaller openings front and back giving into handsomely proportioned rooms. The cross-hallway leads on the left to the wing, which is entirely given over, except for service rooms, to a long ball-room. The place was originally the property of the Beattie family; it was a landmark in the substantial social life of the parish, and was always a prosperous plantation. It was built just a few years later than Woodlawn.

Quite lordly is the manner of "Belle Alliance," just a few miles beyond Napoleonville. It is the largest house between Napoleonville and Donaldsonville, and, in fact, its size and its stateliness are



BELLE ALLIANCE

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the first and remain its outstanding characteristics. It is set far back from the road in a semi-seclusion that suggests hauteur rather than intimacy. Imperial oaks have been made subservient to it, held together in immense, close groups, and leaving a space almost open directly in front of the house. Their august proportions seem expressly suited to those of the house itself and in their relation to it they seem even to acquire part of its spirit, a certain large complacency. That spirit survives as an intrinsic quality, though neglect has imposed upon it the bleak beginnings of desolation. Marble statues, chipped and weather-stained, are set about with formal preciseness in a large oval before the house, and mark the whereabouts of a formal garden, which survives in little more than these forlorn remnants. There are some few shrubs still showing in its outline, choice things requiring pampering, that are sadly dwarfed with lack of care; but palms and other hardy growths, crepe myrtle and olean-der grow outside the limits of the garden, and soften the bareness that exists in its place. And even the mere glint of the marbles and the placing of them is enough to suggest the old garden, to replace it in the imagination as definitely in keeping with the character of the place. The house has suffered much less than the garden and though it is dingy it is not otherwise in disrepair.

Belle Alliance was constructed in the prosperous days of the middle of the past century. Until the past decade, it has been meticulously cared for. Its owners used it as a manor-house, and lived generously even for the customary lavishness of this time. In the days when ocean travel was a great undertaking, they went to Paris frequently taking their own servants, and innumerable trunks for the bestowal of the hoops and crinolines of the ladies and the almost equally elaborate fineries of the men. They had their suites in one of the large

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hotels in Paris, and like several other Louisiana families their box at the opera there as well as at the French Opera House in New Orleans. The house reflects some of this opulence, above the fundamental simplicity of its design.

It is cream-white stucco, with dark green blinds. It is two stories high set level with the ground, with large windows, and wide central doors, with side-lights and transoms on both floors. There is a line of six broad, square piers the height of the two stories in front, with simple, narrow square bases and caps. The piers are made of brick, covered with stucco. Above them is a wide entablature, its simple heavy moulding relieved with a dentil course as bed mould, all of it done in the same creamy stucco. The main entrance is on the second floor, and a broad central stairway runs up to it as wide as the generous space between the columns, with a simple balustrade that ends in a slight graceful curve at the bottom.

A typical thing about the house is its gallery. It is very deep and is supported along the full length of the front of the house by the heavy square piers just mentioned. It juts out beyond, at each end of the house, runs the full reach of the side of it, supported beneath by slender iron colonnettes that might have come from Royal Street, or somewhere in the Garden District of New Orleans. The square that the side gallery has in common with the front is open, but along the side of the house it is covered with a flat roof that comes out from below the entablature and is supported by grills of cast iron. It ties in well enough with the rest of the house, and it is extraordinary how this feature sets the tone of the place, how the touch of ornateness, slight as it is, is emphatic, and seems to place the stamp of the urban and sophisticated.



DUCROS

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Much like Belle Alliance in many details, but totally different from it in spirit is the Ducros Place, on Bayou Terrebonne just beyond Thibodeaux. It is simplicity on a great scale. It makes much of the effect, at once dramatic and dreamy, that is presented in infinite variations of the South. The gleam of sheer white through a richly luxuriant riot of foliage, the breaking of lines that are simple to the point of severity by the gracious swells of thickly-leaved boughs and the heavily tapering pendants of moss. Several fine oaks mass their depths of foliage to make a jagged frame for the place.

Its chief claim to distinction lies in this oneness with its setting, for the house is not remarkably striking or elegant, in spite of the largeness of scale on which it is constructed. It is very long, raised just a foot or so above the ground with a row of square white columns, eight in number, along the front. The columns are set in very narrow square bases with narrow square caps, and they are comparatively small in proportion to their height; this, with the slight elevation of the house, gives it an effect of height in spite of its great length, an effect which is moderately emphasized again by the fact that the cornice, which crowns the rather narrow entablature, is slightly pointed at the center. The relative narrowness of the long windows also contributes something to this feeling for height. There are six windows on each floor, three on each side of the central doors. The doors are very large, with side-lights, and transoms, and on the first floor particularly, the big, square transom, ample to the point of crudity, seems fully a third the height of the door itself.

It, like Belle Alliance, was built about the middle of the past century. It is not one of the most felicitously designed places, for though it has the great size and the simplicity of detail of some of



LEIGHTON

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the older places, it has not been inspired with their apparently instinctive good taste, and its large proportions are not informed with distinction; it has none the less an undeniable effectiveness due to its feeling of commodiousness and to its happy setting.

Also near Thibodeaux, on the south side of the bayou is Leighton Plantation, belonging to Dr. Price. There the setting is rather similar to that of the Ducros Place, and is just as vital and as integral a part of the effect of the house, but its rôle is wholly different. There is little undergrowth, but numerous old oaks, with their crusty, great-girthed trunks brown-black or purplish-black, their depths of vigorous, dull-green foliage intershot with the jagged veinings of long twisted branches, dripping eternally and quietly their mournful gray moss. And, instead of offering the contrast of gleaming white or some rich color, the house takes its theme from that of its setting and in an even dark gray forms with it a harmony. It is a place of twilight tones, not sad, but restful, quiet, touched with a pleasing melancholy. The time we visited Leighton Plantation was late afternoon. The long shadows with streaks of emerald green stretched themselves the length of the broad lawn. The light in the moss and the thick foliage of the live oaks possessed an almost dramatic quality. As we studied the house, a string of white geese marched their solemn way across one corner of the picture and somehow completed the scene.

The house has an air of snuggling close to the ground under the far-reaching branches and the deep shadows of its encompassing trees. Its large shapes all seem to have a downward feeling. It is very long and gives the impression of being low, with a high roof that slopes sharply down and out over a deep gallery that runs along the whole

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front of the house. There is a row of dormers set far down on the roof, close to the edge, so that they emphasize the sharpness of its slant: they are delightfully quaint, flat-pointed with round-arched window frames. The numerous columns are square, rather squat, with substantial square caps. The entrance-doors are towards the ends, with two short windows beyond them on the ends and four short central windows. Low, squat chimneys bestride the sharp roof. It is a house with a personality, not gay, but serene in its sweet, deep, impenetrable gray calm.





CHAPTER V

HOUMA AND BEYOND

*Mary, Southdown, Viola, Fairfax, Oaklawn
and many smaller ones*



FOLLOWING the road to Houma there are bayous big and little to be crossed. There is Bayou Folse, Bayou du Mar and sometimes one not more than a thread. There are miles when the swamps are banded with a solid sheet of lavender, where the water-hyacinths have possessed the stream of the bayou.

The name and varying descriptions and the enticement of a small bayou that meandered between sizable banks lured us some two miles from the main road to find Mary Plantation. The bayou is a negligible bright stream that looks coyly over the shoulder of a low levee, absurd enough with the stream at its summer level.

There was a man making leisurely way on a bicycle, and we stopped him to ask the road. He pushed back his hat, and ran his fingers through his hair, while he looked at us vaguely, murmuring, "Quoi donc?" Then he suddenly became conscious of the question and

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gave lengthy, slow-spoken directions, in very French-marked English.

Across the fields, a scattered grove of trees appears, with a line of low houses at right angles to the road, and there, to be sure, is Mary Plantation. The air is a welter of tangible sunshine, in which sound seems to lose itself: the occasional crow of a rooster seems muffled. There is the purple glow of some weed in the thick grass of the levee, and beyond it are visible the jagged roof lines of houses on the other side of the bayou. From somewhere, a plantation bell crashes metallicly into the tense stillness, and there is a scattered movement of workmen in and out of the small houses. But the big house is aloof.

It is "the big house" by courtesy only, as the title always accorded the master's dwelling on a plantation. Actually, its dimensions are moderate. The character of it is distinctive, radically a departure from the typical plantation house. Its motif is the strange treatment of the roof, which comes down in a long, leisurely slope, covers a capacious gallery, which has its own balustrade and steps, and then continues out to an outer line of columns which are set into the ground, and have a picket fence connecting them. A house near St. Francisville uses that same curious idea. There are squat brick chimneys at each end, on the Mary Plantation house, and, with the long sweep of the roof line, the little place has a novel and interesting individuality.

Attention is naturally always focussed on houses ambitiously designed, the multitude of whose acres have given them the dignity of a name and the title of plantation. But many of the smaller places, tucked in enshrouding shrubbery, or under guardian trees, prove to be charming individualities structurally, and command a

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pause by some felicitous play of mass or line. The examples are legion. One of the happiest that craves notice in the clamoring memories of them all is a certain little place near Houma. There is a line of negro cabins sociably flush with the road, then a negro store, where half a dozen loungers are probably ranged in an acme of relaxation; some three or four sitting on the steps, grouped about one who plays a three-stringed guitar, while they all sing. Beyond there is a picket fence, a stretch of ill-tended lawn, and the house in question. It is a long, low dingy white little house, with a smart, sharp slope of roof, a wide low two-windowed dormer with green shutters breaking impressively in the center of it. Its wide gallery has a row of small, square white posts, and two doors of generous width in the center of it. The main body of the house is of brick, but there is weatherboarding for the front and back, and for the triangle under the roof's slope. A weatherworn white dovecote, octagon-shape, as high as the house, stands to one side of it; in front, across the high-road, is the slow, dark expanse of Bayou Black, and at the side of the house between high, sloping grassy banks, meanders another smaller bayou, with a dilapidated flat-boat stranded on its bank.

There is a harmony of pleasant melancholy in a little house near Chacahoula. A fence of rough, hand-hewn pickets, gray-green with lichens, surrounds its ample grounds; a wistaria arbor, with heavy, dropping foliage makes a somber arcade to the steps. The house itself has a small, heavy dignity, for all the moderateness of its size; it has square columns, doors with side-lights, and a simple nicety of the details at the top of the columns and over the doors, and there are modillions under the roof. Huge oaks about it dwarf its size,

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and hold it in somber shadow with heavy foliage and heavy hanging clumps of grey moss.

It is decidedly the part of wisdom to turn off at Houma, just the other side of it, where bayou meets bayou and the land turns a bleakness of green for a mile or so. After that there are more fields of green, the knife-slender pennons of cane, sturdy armies of it, a sugar house, a grove of trees with a glint of color far in, promising a house; but the house proves to be a sophisticated place of cosmopolitan conception and one follows the turn of the road to Southdown Plantation.

Southdown has a manner of its own. It has attendant oaks in wide-spread intervals on either side, but the way to the house is clear. It is a rambling, two-story white brick place, spreading out turret-like at the ends, and fronted with spacious galleries. A high hedge is not too thick to prevent glimpses of a riotously flowering square garden at one end of the house. The house was built in 1860 and designed on generous lines. However, while the intended impressiveness fails, there is a delightful felicitousness that is wholly accidental, apparently, but quite noteworthy in the arrangement of a square-columned side gallery. Also the back wings where a two-story outbuilding which houses the kitchen and service quarters takes hold upon the main house with a debonair curve of covered, colonnaded passage that is quite delightful. The side wing, too, just back of a rounded turret, has a nice simplicity, with its own bit of gallery, and broad, straight steps. Burnside Plantation, on the other side of the Mississippi, achieves a measure of its pleasantest effect just as casually.

At Southdown there are fine old portraits on the wall, some signed with celebrated names; an endless array of Waterford glasses, Sèvres



ALONG THE UPPER TECHE

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ornaments and vases, signed pieces, in almost all the rooms. The whole place is built in the pre-war lavishness of proportion and holds a rich garnering of the years gathered with cultured taste and discrimination. It is one of the few places that have remained always in the hands of the same family.

The little garden on the side of the house is a place of delight, and the rose-garden is even more extensive. It is over the oak-shaded lawn from the house, with a grassy, meandering path leading to it. Its border is formed of an unruly hedge, of bridal-wreath, oleanders, altheas, cut roughly to a height of some ten feet. Within, the roses bloom in a glorious abandon, no matter what the season of the year. Even in devastating June, the endless ranks of flower-beds stretch away in a soft glory of color, pink radiance roses on trees as high as one's head, red roses, white roses, some of them as big as saucers. There are clusters of other flowers: white water-lilies gleaming in a great round tip-tilted fountain which is an old sugar kettle; crimson hibiscus, rosy clouds of crepe myrtle, and white oleander. Two towering palms dominate all.

The lower fork of the Houma road leads with various allure to Morgan City, and eventually, of course, to the Teche, with a versatility of bayous all the way, the road bordered for miles with a sunken bank of lavender, with hyacinths, then offering stretches of diaphanous willows; or ranks of giant gaunt cypresses, stark, high-branched, wildly mournful. Suddenly, a clear, broad sheet of water-lilies lies ahead; the road turns at right angles, and shows a heavy line of green cutting into a broad stretch of joining waters.

Viola Plantation is picturesquely in the bend, a long, low, grey old place on high brick piers with wide steps leading up to the center

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of its broad gallery. The roof covers the house with a high slope, but breaks its line to reach out with a milder pitch over the gallery. A well-kept garden with flowering shrubs that show a lusty growth of years fills all the space down to the road, and is thickly planted, with cosmos and summer marigold and petunias brilliant among the shrubs. A grape-vine with gnarled beginnings wound together thicker than one's arm covers a long arbor that arches over the entrance walk and makes a space of vaulted shade which looks deliciously inviting in the swimming sunlight. Viola Plantation dates back near to the century mark, built somewhere about 1830. It was the property of the well-known Patout family until recent times, when it has changed hands, but still has distinction and is still spoken of often as "the old Patout place."

Morgan City is a mildly busy little town. The Atchafalaya River, Bayou Boeuf, and Bayou Teche come together there and form an expanse of glittering water known as Berwick Bay. Further on, Patterson, Franklin and Jeanerette follow in quick succession, trim, well-groomed, little old towns of well-ordered vigor. The Teche begins to mark on the landscape its impress of pensive elegance.

An unregretful old centenarian is the Fairfax Plantation, between Patterson and Centerville. It stands far back



FAIRFAX



SLAVE QUARTERS

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from the road, almost on the banks of the Teche, which is clean-cut and silvery shining there, almost level with its gently sloping grass-banks. There are trees at irregular intervals, live-oaks chiefly, and willows; and a haphazard field of cane in front of the house comes quite up to the road. The house is said to be a hundred and fifteen years old, and one can easily believe it. It is tall, and dignified in its manner of a Virginia Plantation, but lacking in customary architectural detail. This simplicity, however, is so consistent that the place has character, and even compels a sort of affectionate admiration. The house gives an impression of height: it stands two stories high, and the sharp rise of its roof is brought still higher by a large hexagonal "watch-tower" which crowns it. "Slave quarters" that look as old as the big house nestle close to it. In plan it is practically square and the pedimented porticos on front and back have a line of four large square columns which run the full height of its two tall stories. There are heavy shutters, perfectly plain, almost ugly in themselves, but so in keeping with the crude dignity of the place that they become actually peculiarly satisfying, as things do that are perfectly in character. The house is worn past belief, but the material of which it is constructed is of such endurance, of such fine hardiness, that it has not yet given way, but produces the effect rather that the weather has rubbed it down, and polished it, till it has the satiny quality of teakwood. Pickaninnies play on its deep front gallery.

There are numbers of quite delightful smaller houses all along the road. There is one just outside of Baldwin that is a good instance. Its builder was perhaps longing for some old French château, and let the spirit of it find what expression it could in this modestly-proportioned, half-masonry, half frame structure. It has character,



OAK LAWN

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that little house. It is done with white brick in front and wooden sides; there is an old russet-colored cistern at the side, and in front, by the steps, a crepe myrtle in a flare of rosy bloom. There are stout, square brick chimneys. The roof is high, and sharply slanted, and perched high up on it are nicely-proportioned little dormers. The house is set on brick foundations, and little round, squat brick piers support the gallery, on which a line of small, rounded white wooden colonnettes sustains the ample sweep of roof. The low basement floor has a brick wall studded with a row of small windows. The gallery is generously provided with steps, for a wide flight leads up to the center of it, and again, smaller steps lead up at the end. It is altogether a charming bit of a place, with a character of its own.

The romances and gallantries and the large manner of living which is the South of yesterday seems a pleasant unsubstantial thing. However, places in the manner of Oak Lawn perform a miracle of incarnation, and give form and body and the breath of life to the graceful legendary people. So all the tales often vouched for but never seeming to have the stuff of truth, acquire a solidity: the banquet with the five-dollar bills used as cigarette lighters, the wedding gifts, of six men slaves and six women slaves, each with a turban full of gold on the head, to this and all their glittering ilk one is instantly attuned by a view of Oak Lawn.

It is on a by-way from the main road. The highway passes Caffery Plantation with its usual attendant store and sugar-house bristling with smoke-stacks, and then shapes its course after the practical maxim about the shortest distance between two points. A different sort of wisdom inspires the by-way, which follows the leisurely

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meanderings of the Teche, never more beautiful than just there, where it takes a limpid way level with the land, silver in places, gleaming in the sun, or blotted into the landscape by the heavy shadows of oaks whose branches sometimes meet across its narrow stream.

A mile or so, with endless stretches of the open fields of cotton and cane, utter calm and hardly a human being in evidence. Then appears an ordered grove of gigantic oaks, and there is the house, massive, beautiful, back in its sheltering trees, proportioned as magnificently as they, its giant white columns gleaming through their gnarled trunks, the immense main house flanked by a wing that is like it but smaller, one of the largest and most important of the old houses in the state, and laid out splendidly. Its outbuildings crumble, but the oaks shield them; the Teche lies just beyond.

There is an immediate compelling grandeur about the house itself. One stands in awe of it, instinctively one becomes conscious of a personal smallness before it, almost as before a cathedral. Its dinginess is not apparent from far, and the impression is superbly imposing, of the great bulk of the house, painted a soft yellow, the openings green, and the rows of white columns gleaming before it, in the jagged revelations of the oaks. Within the line of white columns, there is a long, light balcony for the second floor, with its balustrade embroidering the face of the house in heavy wooden patterns. Another little gallery with wrought-iron balustrade fronts the high attic windows of both front and rear gables.

The wing is a charming building in itself, flanking the house off to the side, and joining to it by a short covered balcony, with steps running down to it from the galleries of the main house. It echoes

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impeccably the style of the main house, its simple, round, white columns, the manner of its openings, its long gallery, with everything on a slightly smaller scale, and the juxtaposition of the two makes all the more strikingly marked the massively grandiose conception of the place. It is the back of the house that one sees from the road. The front faces the serene tranquillity of the bayou, across stretches of lawn, now unkempt, with oaks standing down to the water's edge, and reaching to oaks that are ranged thickly on the other side of the stream.

The front is quite like the back. It has a deep main gallery, and lighter balcony and iron work. There is a fine central door designed with the nobility of scale which the house requires, very wide, with side-lights, and fan-lights, and in the Greek tradition. Round columns enhance its stateliness. The details of construction are beautiful in every instance. The fan-lights particularly are charming; they show an Empire influence in their design, and have little rosettes on the ribs. The broad windows are elliptical at the top, with typical fan-lights, and heavy shutters.

Fragments^{*} remain of a quaint little old-fashioned garden, an oval arc, enclosed in a fence of wrought iron, directly in front of the wide, low central steps, and the garden space is pleasantly rank with cedars, and Japanese plums, crepe myrtle, sweet-olive, and roses.

Spectacular, nothing less, is the effect when one steps inside the great center door: so huge is the hall that runs unbroken from the front to the back door, so high are the ceilings, so immense the suggestion of space. And all this mammoth size is made all the more evident, because the place is at present bare and dingy. There is a cross hall slightly off center, opening with a very wide arch, that

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has a graceful fan-light over it. A lovely curving stairway placed here leads to the floor above. The whole third floor is one immense room, formerly the ball-room and the theater of the house, when the owner used to entertain lavishly with guests drawn from the whole parish and from New Orleans. There were balls whose magnificence has become a matter of tradition. Of the outbuildings, there is a remnant, charming in its disintegration even, of a little dairy that Marie Antoinette need not have scorned, a cunning little place, set in the midst of close oak-trees. Its salmon-pink bricks, overlaid with a yellow wash at the base, makes a spot of color softly bright in the gloomy shadows. Light shines in through the caved-in roof, and the walls are ready to crumble, but it must have been very trim and alluring once. Long marble slabs, and shallow marble basins still remain to tell its purpose.

The house was occupied then by a "Cajan" family of innumerable progeny. They lounged multitudinously on the gallery and talked with visitors with good-natured tolerance.

"It's not much now," one of them commented. "It used to be the prettiest place a man could see. But it's going, it's going," he concluded unregretfully. His real pride was in the pear arbor which he asserted was planted during the Civil War,—a statement not hard to believe in view of the gnarled, thick stems of the trees.

"There's a man living hereabouts helped to plant them," he said. Then added, by way of commentary, "But he's an old man." Oak Lawn was old when the pear-trees were set out, however. It was built by Alexander Porter, an Irish immigrant, who came over in 1810, and became a notable figure in affairs of the state and of the nation. He was a delegate to the first Constitutional Convention in

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1812, became a justice, a senator, and then a minister to Spain. He married one of the Fusollier family, who were bound up with all the wealth and influence of the time, and the magnificent plantation home was the center of brilliant entertainment for years. Henry Clay was one of the many distinguished guests entertained there. During the Civil War, the Porters were Union sympathizers, and when the "unpleasantness" was over, they closed the house and went away for years. The old inhabitants love to tell of an incident in the war, when a Federal colonel rode up under the oaks, at the head of his troops. The loyal Mrs. Porter went out and stood before the great door to receive him. He rode to the steps; she curtsied; he saluted, with a sweep of his sabre, and asked hurriedly,

"Madam, can you tell me which way the rebels have gone?"

She answered readily, "Sir, I can. They are bound for Franklin."

He, in proud acumen, thinking her a rebel lady trying to lead him astray, turned and led his men as fast as he might in the opposite direction from Franklin, and the "rebels" escaped untroubled. Later, the event was celebrated in this same house.





CHAPTER VI

THE TECHE COUNTRY

*St. Martinsville, Darby, Shadows of the Teche, Grand Coteau,
Old convent buildings, Chrétien Point*



DREAMY loveliness hangs over the Teche country and has made it widely known for beauty. The bayou that gives it its name has an unending charm. Its motion is imperceptible. For miles it is laid like an ever-curling silver ribbon flat along a level countryside, with bright willows shattering it into tiny ripples of light with their trailing branches and somber-leaved oaks reaching out the far span of their branches in rough outlines of shadow, darkly luminous in the sunshine. Then it goes through high banks with



CYPRESS

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the perpetual oaks walking up them in heavy silence and red earth showing through a tangle of vines and tree roots; there the water is a sullen color and the lily-pads which are crowded thick, rocking infinitesimally in every recess of the stream, seem dull in tone, except when, very early and very late, the sunlight finds its way there and drenches everything in eerie brilliance.

The land is cut in irregular patterns of the various greens of cultivated fields or the russet of newly ploughed ones; threaded frequently with lanes that are bordered with luxuriant foliage and the highway itself lies often through banks of green, where there are cherokee-roses, clusters of elder bushes, drenching the air with sweetness, and occasional oaks that hang a soothing canopy of shadow over the road. There are many mocking-birds; the sound of their small, delirious trilling is everywhere, like that of the grasshoppers in Provence. In fact, the Teche country, though it is much more lush than Provence, is vaguely reminiscent of it somehow, perhaps because of the welter of sunshine that lies over it, or the warm dreaminess of the landscape, the incessant multiplicity of the insect noises, and because the sun-drenched atmosphere is always heavy with the scent of warm earth and of flowers.

"Ah, that Teche country," as one of its dwellers exclaimed, with that French turn of phrase characteristic of him, though his family has lived in America for four generations, "but it is beautiful. One loves it as though it were a lady."

A lovely lady with an individuality many-faceted, who laughs one moment in gay fields of the bright green of rice, or the deep green of cane and of cotton; is tenderly sentimental the next, with the

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silver ribbon of the bayou laid level with the fields, and the willows drooping languorously into it; a hoyden with green country lanes and gay wreaths of crepe myrtle, and the creamy jagged clusters of elderberry flowers heavy with scent; a grande dame, when the white pillars of a stately house gleam through the ranks of solemn oaks that form its guard of honor.

It is a suave country, in life as well as in landscape. Several generations have waxed and waned there and left a rich mould, in customs, in traditions and language. French predominated largely among the early settlers, and later these were reinforced by the advent of the "Acadians," who left us as a legacy the tale of Evangeline and a marked effect on the French accent. Those who evidence it most strongly are called popularly "Cajans," which is the modern "reductio" of "Acadians" evidently. You find a gentleman with an Irish name who speaks English as though he had just left the Faubourg St. Germain. On the streets of St. Martinsville, you attempt a conversation with the old colored man, a paralytic, who begs there, and results are *nil* until a passer-by advises you to try French. Instantly he becomes voluble in that language!

St. Martinsville is still the center of the Teche country, a dreamy little place sleeping by the sleepy bayou. The movement of its life is as calm as that of the quiet water. It is all in one tone; its houses, small and unpretentious, are formed for the most part in the same tradition, a tradition not often more recent than sixty years ago. They are built on simple lines, many of them are plastered, often one-story, always with galleries, and columns, and almost always with windows that have batten blinds, and doorways generous in proportion with side-lights.

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One of the most imposing of them has two stories, with rounded columns below, and smaller graceful colonnettes above. It speaks its sense of dignity, finely if simply, in its doorway, which has a certain stateliness of proportion with its side-lights and top-lights. Just across from it in a garden studded with shrubs and flowers, is a long, low cottage, with a quaint beamed porch. There is a small church, a pretty little building, recently furnished, but it is obviously of a date with the old town's beginnings. There is a convent that is interesting: it is red brick, rich in color, showing traces of balconies that have vanished. It has been renovated, with the result usual with such endeavors. The improvements show total obliviousness of its original state, which was evidently good; but the doorway, nicely proportioned and with a low flattened arch, speaks of an earlier charm.

Just behind the convent is the bayou, and a graceful oak tree of moderate size leans over it. It is one of the numerous trees which are designated as "The Evangeline Oak," but it seems unlikely that it had progressed even so far as the acorn stage in the days of Evangeline!

Quiet rests in the little town. There are no trams; motor-cars are occasional, as is the pulse of a boat on the bayou. There are trees everywhere, giant oaks for the most part. Over the bayou on a rise of ground there is a quaint little cemetery whose tombstones are musty and covered with mould, but with some names which are linked with traditions of the country. Formerly, St. Martinsville was the social center for miles around, and had its own opera season and its own brilliant balls, and was noted as a cultural center. It was



DARBY

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an objective, too, and an appreciative market of smuggled goods brought there from France by way of the Bayou Vermilion. The divergence of transportation from the bayou has left it in a back-water, where it remains with quiet charm.

One may start from St. Martinsville for the Darby Place. On the road towards the flourishing town of New Iberia, there is a gigantic oak that stands at a crossroad. Of its network of branches, there is one that reaches as straight as a rod, back, clean across the road. It is said to mark the site of the little village of St. Mar, twin, in Longfellow's metred tale, to St. Martinsville. More grimly, it is called the hanging oak, because negro offenders were hanged there during Reconstruction days. By this signal one is guided towards the cross-road to the Darby Place.

The grimness of the guidepost is forbiddingly appropriate, for there is a whole Darby legend in the countryside. All of the direct line have died with the exception of Mr. François Darby. He lives in the place alone and has the reputation of pursuing with an axe visitors whose personalities displease him. Viewed in the light of these reports, the cross-lane seems almost sinister; the road is good, but it leads through a tangle of vines and underbrush that are picturesque but wild, so thick that one has to keep a sharp lookout in order not to miss the gate. It is a narrow break in walls of riotous foliage by the road. The gate has a quaintness and simplicity that is rather fine: there are two square green posts topped with classic wooden urns, nicely turned, that give an effect of quiet dignity. Beyond is a clutter of underbrush under immense trees, with branches that sweep the ground in places, and are thickly draped with Spanish moss.

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A suggestion of irregularity in the overgrowth of bushes and weeds suggests rather than asserts a pathway. There is stillness and melancholy and the air is musty with desolation. A piece of rusty ploughshare lies in the path; an old broken wagon-wheel at the side of it. One makes one's way hesitantly. Suddenly, without a sound, there appears before us an old man, stocky, sturdy, with an iron gray beard and keen, irascible dark eyes.



GATE, DARBY

"Who are you?" he challenges, and there is suspicion in his low voice which has nevertheless a note of culture in its inflections. It is an awesome moment, but peace may finally be concluded, even to his acting as guide. He shows the place and tells its history laconically, in a dispassionate tone, though, when French is launched, he grows less taciturn. But he continues to look suspiciously at the visitor with a sketching pad.

"Not a penny to be expended—*pas un sou à dépenser!*" he exclaims warningly, at intervals throughout the visit.

De la Mare might have had the place in mind when he wrote "The Listeners." Desolation and decay reign. Doors sag, shutters are off their hinges, a piece of balcony is gone, and the steps lurch crazily. But an original beauty of construction retains its charm even in this

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dissolution, and the setting enhances the effect. Giant trees rise up on all sides, oaks and pecans, dripping their dreary gray moss; there is one pecan tree that is more than a hundred years old. Only on one side can be glimpsed through the dense foliage a bit of cultivated field. Utter silence reigns except for innumerable small wood noises and the far tinkle of a cow-bell.

The house is a two-story one with a gallery on two sides and on a part of the back. There is a line of columns, of stucco-covered brick, quite simple, that runs the full two stories; they are round and moderately sized, giving an effect of lightness and grace that is an outstanding feature. The lower floor is level with the ground, and on the right, in front an unemphatic but substantial flight of steps climbs along the front face of the house to connect with the upper gallery. Just in front of the steps is a doorway which is still imposing, though it is worn down to the wood and its joints gape sadly. An unusual feature of it is its two long narrow panels, which run the length of the door.

Inside, the plan is quite simple. There is a central hall, with rooms on each side, and an unimportant stairway leading to the second floor. The ceilings on the first floor are low, but those on the second are high and the rooms are quite delightfully proportioned.

The wood-work is all of cypress and the floor-boards are panelled throughout the house, and are as solid, apparently, as when they were first set in place. All is touched with the spirit of dissolution.

The desolation and neglect are even more marked on the interior than on the exterior, where nature at least has lent a softening hand.

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There are débris, dust, broken furniture, broken glass, litter on the floors. Handsome pieces of antique furniture shoved in corners: piled on top of one another, in corners of rooms otherwise bare. In one room, a beautiful old mahogany hautboy had the remnants of a meal scattered over it, and unwashed dishes were set in its half-opened drawer. There was a heavy four-post mahogany bed in the room, the covers in disorder. Almost every room had a mahogany bed of excellent workmanship, and there were dressing-tables, armoires, lowboys, tables in keeping. There was a miniature four-poster that was particularly charming, and in a front room upstairs a very handsome old secretary.

Prior to the middle of the last century, mixed at random with others of later date, family letters, clippings from papers. There are interesting portraits of various ancestors of the present owner: some suggested his exceptionally fine shape of head, some the choleric dark eyes.

The names were all interesting, significant of the history of the country, with its intermingling of races. There was François St. Mar Darby, who built the house. His father was an Englishman of position, who had the land by a Spanish grant, which the present owner still has in the original Spanish with an English translation. He built a log cabin on the place. His son married a French beauty of the time, with a name as beautiful, Félicité de St. Amand, and it was for her that the house, then a fine structure, was built. The family prospered, and the present owner in his young manhood was a figure in social life in New Orleans, where the family maintained a "town house" and their box at the opera.

Later, the fortune dwindled and he, with his brother, Octave, and



SHADOWS OF THE TECHE (LILY POOL)

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a sister, moved to the country place, where they lived sombrely, apart from the world. They were high tempered and bitter. The brothers lived in the same house for years without speaking and many stories are told of their eccentricities. If Octave's cows got in François' fields, François, as he was not on speaking terms with him, let him know by singing a little song about it at the top of his voice. Octave was known as the "hermit." He sold milk, and went about delivering it before dawn, wearing always a frock coat. There is a story that the sister promised all her share in the property to one of the brothers, thereby enraging the other. She left a sealed will, and when he went with his lawyer to have the will probated, it was found to contain only a blank sheet of paper, that she had a final taunt at both of them.

Neglect has touched leprous fingers to so many fine old houses that it is refreshing to find one that is adequately cared for, with an intelligence that appreciates the spirit of its conception and keeps every aspect up to its greatest effectiveness. Such is "The Shadows of the Teche," the property of Mr. Weeks Hall at New Iberia. The old house, the grounds, the gardens, the Teche in the background, form a harmonious unity, a certain exquisiteness of quality, that belongs to a thing matured and perfected.

It is enlightening to learn that this idyl is of comparatively recent re-creation for it illustrates encouragingly what can be done with these old houses even after decay has made great headway. The Shadows of the Teche was built in 1832 and has been in the possession of the same family since that time, but from the end of the last century until just a few years ago, it was put in charge of a caretaker—very inappropriately so called—and gradually reached

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a distressing state of ruin, until its owner returned and set about the work of restoring.

The restoration is an artistic achievement, for with all the renovations and improvements necessary, the spirit of the place has been unerringly preserved. It is easy to imagine the original owner on horseback cantering off from before its great white columns for an inspection of his plantation. Of his wife, appearing in the doorway in one of the quaint costumes (which the attic preserves), a riding-habit of red velvet, for instance, with a waist which any modern woman could span with her two hands. Or a later heiress, in the bustles and tight bodices of the seventies and eighties promenading decorously on the deep front gallery with one of the gallants from New Orleans who were responsible for the numerous invitations to Carnival balls of the period which cram old boxes in the house. The place has the mellowness of years infused with unostentatious good living, comfortable culture and good taste.

The extensive acres which once surrounded it have greatly diminished, and it is now almost in the center of New Iberia, a little town which has prospered prettily, with wide, shady streets, and nice houses set back in generous ground space. The town in its growth has spared to the Shadows of the Teche ample space, so that it has not lost the feeling of seclusion, warm and intimate, and the large easy spirit of a country home. Before the house stands a grove of fine old trees, whose growth has a distinctive character: the branches, instead of reaching out straight and far, stretch up cathedral-like into dim-vaulted shadowy depths of green. There is no central opening among the trees: the path to the house itself is a half-moon line between two side gates, with the center of its

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arch before the low entrance steps of the gallery. The trees are a solid phalanx before the house; there is no underbrush, only among them the ground is carpeted with a low growth of dark succulent heavy grasses, with occasional clumps of bamboo.

This somber shadowiness has a curiously protective effect: it sets the house off safely to itself. Through the straight files of dark trunks, the salmon-color of the old bricks and the fresh white columns gleam with a poignant cheeriness. Between the trees in the front and back on either side of the house is an open sunny space, of lawn and flower beds. Flowers and flowering shrubs take up the note of brightness.

To the right of the house and on the terrace, a shallow lily pool with a tiny jet of water rising from among three small turtles makes a glistening, tinkling splash. There are the crinkly diaphanous blooms of crepe myrtle, deep rose-color, mauve, white. There are scattered clumps of oleander, and in the damp musty earth between, vivid tiger-lilies spring up apparently at random. Far up in a branch of an oak tree, a brilliant spot of color shows gaily the whereabouts of an enterprising macaw.

By the fountain, at the far end, one crepe myrtle in particular makes a happy play of pinks and greens and grays that an artist would hesitate to attempt; dripping with gray moss, it takes its gnarled age lustily with a perfect flare of cloudy, deep pink bloom crowning its delicate green foliage. Beyond the fountain, on a line with the house, long low stretches of hedge make formal lines for incorrigibly riotous beds of flowers, brilliant in color. At the square turns of the hedge are set classical statues, and in the center of the long grassy rectangle is a shrine of impenetrable green, a thick-

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clipped arbor, open at one end to give a glimpse of the lichen-covered head of a stone goddess in its far recess.

Harmony is the pervading quality of the place, oneness with its setting, the impression of consistency and unity of feeling. Of the many component parts which go to make up its effect, none stand out above others; they fit smoothly, with nothing dramatic, or startling, in size or color or setting. It is satisfying, serene. Above all it reveals a kindly, intelligent and affectionate conception on the part of its owner.

The house itself is comparatively small in scale, but there is a certain completeness about it; the roof, the galleries, the columns, are proportioned with that feeling. The roof slants in a single easy slope from the back of the house out to cover the deep galleries that run the full length of the front. Three dormers are a grateful feature by reason of their simple elegance of shape and the niceness of their proportions with regard to the extensive roof space. Handsome columns of the Greek Doric Order, unfluted and well executed in brick and stucco, set on low, square bases, give an air of much dignity; a frieze that includes triglyphs of classic purity and a simple wooden cornice are delightfully in character. The doors with moderately sized transoms and no side-lights, and the windows with narrow frames, are good but unemphatic, and one detects a French influence in this restraint. The main stairway has been placed with frank simplicity at one end of the deep front gallery—a typical Louisiana arrangement—which has been shuttered in deference to it.

The house is raised only slightly above the ground, which has been brought up to it in front and on the side in a deep, shallow, grass-

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covered terrace. A brick walkway cuts across it to the central entrance door, and is in itself a pleasant feature, dark and mossy, with gay flecks of arbutus pricking their way up in the crevices.

The building has little depth; the rooms in front open directly onto the brick-paved first floor gallery, and there is no central hall. A cross-hall in the back leads into kitchen and service rooms at one end, and at the other gives place for an auxiliary or service stairway.

There is a sharp slope of ground back of the house with the Teche quiet at the base of it; huge oaks are set there, and some of them reach rough-shaped branches far out over the water. In the far corner of the yard small white flecks are the few remaining headstones that mark the burial places of ancient masters.

Every hour of the day presents a different aspect of the charm of the place. Sunset has a magic millionfold—ever-shifting. In the glimmering twilight under the trees, it finds a way of pouring color into some spots, of sharply blackening others, of picking out a tree on the far bank and etching it cleanly in a cloud of golden dust. At times, it finds a cranny in the green mass of leaves, surges through in a flood of shimmering light to where the hyacinth pads float quietly on the water; it transfigures them, gives them an unearthly radiance, till they seem fragments of white molten metal in the white fire of the bayou. A river steamer, turning the bend at night, produces an effect as dramatic, with its searchlight. Moonlight ekes a way through the branches, makes vague patterns in the earth-scented darkness, and marks a path of gold on the bayou blotted with the shadows of the trees. And always there is the comforting beauty of the house in the background.

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Beyond New Iberia the land becomes rolling and almost hilly in places. Lines of trees mark guess-at threads of bayous. Bayou Vermilion opens more widely. And the fields continue to flourish with their lush, succulent color and the riotous hedges fresh beside them.

From Lafayette it is but a few miles to Grand Coteau and a past century. There is no plantation there, it is true, but it has the spirit of the old plantation houses, the dignity, the evidence of an original design of noble simplicity which the years have beautifully mellowed. It is like the wise old man of Maeterlink in its calm, its quiet, its suggestion of unuttered experiences. There is a little church, newly painted, designed in a faultless taste, dating back to 1819. Over the hill, negligibly, is the Capuchin seminary. The thing that matters is the long avenues of giant trees that range in ancient order in every direction; the turf beneath them is the rich mould of years, noiseless to walk on. There is an utter calm, a hushed stillness of ripe years, intensified by the occasional twitter and scream of jays. Down one avenue or another a monk walks, in sober brown, his head bent over a book of prayers. It is a place of age-old peace.

Near the church there is a fragment of an old garden, squares of box hedge outlining a formal design, with here and there althea and crepe myrtle losing the brightness of their blossoms in all this grey mellowness.

There is a little cemetery just up the slight slope of hill,—utter peace in the midst of peace. It opens with a turnstile, weighted with an iron ornament taken from one of the graves. In the twilight of

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overhanging trees there are brick tombs, some with iron enclosures, many of them beautifully wrought; in one corner the more somber low black wooden crosses of the priests. The epitaphs are fascinating, many of them dating back to the first half of the last century, with strange French names. One of the most elaborate reads:

Epitaphe
de
C. L.
ne le 17 Decembre 1773
decede le 21 Janvier 1847
Ecrit par lui-meme a son lit de mort
ici repose
Un quidam qui fut peu de chose
Et qui maintenant n'est plus rien.
De la fortune s'il eut mince dose
C'est qu'il fut toujours homme de bien.

Ceci n'est point un epigramme; j'ai connu bien des riches honnête gens et dont je me fais gloire d'avoir été l'ami.

Son epouse
Louise Henry, née a Paris le 26 juillet 1781
decedee a Bellevue Opelousas le 29 Septembre 1855

Translated roughly, without the glamor of the antiquated French phrasing, it runs,—

"Epitaph
of
C. L.
Born the 17 December 1773
Died January 21, 1847
Written by himself on his death-bed.
Here lies
One of worth never more than little,
Now not even that is in sight;
Of wealth if he always had little
'Twas because he always did right."

This is not an epigram: I have known many honest rich men, whose friendship I considered it an honor to have."

Onesiphore Broussard, Zenor Broussard, Eudes Thibodeau, Delphine Guitry, Hippolyte Mallet pere, Ferjus Bergeron, Aloisius Curioz, are among the names to be found on the old tombstones.

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Wrought iron is worked into innumerable decorations, its somber-toned laciness in keeping with the spirit of the place. There are elaborately desired crosses of every size and kind, many of them exquisite in conception and beautifully executed.

Silently in the silence, an old monk appeared, apparently out of nowhere, speaking in a deep, low, monotonous voice. He has been there since 1870 and has a wealth of its tradition at his command. The occupants of the tombs are his familiars. There is much of one Judge Chrétien who built the plantation at Chrétien Point, who owned five hundred slaves and limitless acres, and lived like a lord.



AT GRAND COTEAU

The plane trees of Perpignan have an international fame, but there is an avenue that leads from the church at Grand Coteau that is even more splendid and imposing. For a mile and a half it extends in a great double avenue widely spaced, live-oaks and pecans alternating and intermingling the diverse color of their foliage, some of them easily twelve feet in circumference. It is superb.

The house at the end has disappeared, but it is worth while follow-

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ing the avenue and the cross road at the end of it where the trees multiply and become a forest. A short way on there is a gleam of high white picket fence, a great, sweet garden enclosed in it, and far back, the convent, creamy white. It is one of the oldest in Louisiana, but is perfectly cared for, a quaint building, so long, that it looks low, though it is three stories high. It is of cream-colored plaster with small fluted iron Corinthian columns, fan-lights with dainty traceries on them, and a long line of dormers that make the place look like an old French château. Its gardens, laid out curiously in octagons and circles and squares, and dating back to 1852, is charming. There is a hedge of azaleas eighteen feet high, and a riot of shrubs and blooming flowers held in the quaint shapes of the beds. There are roses trained on fan-shaped trellises, petunias, hydrangeas and daisies, blooming in the midst of japonicas three feet in circumference, of sweet-olives gnarled with age, pittosporum, pink, and white, and red oleanders, and rose-colored and white myrtle, all very meticulously tended.

Back in the field by the convent where palmettos thrive in decorative clusters—the Mother Superior says there are twenty-seven varieties of them—is an original structure which is older than the convent, certainly. Surely it harked back to Italy for the spirit that shaped its proportions, a tiny place, but quite charming—definitely, decidedly, a personality of a little place. It made much of its first floor, which is a masonry-brick, and a cream-colored plaster, with windows set into it symmetrically on either side. The second floor is of wood, painted a deeper cream than the first floor; it is smaller, lower, and has funny, tiny, brown little windows. It is altogether different from the suave conventionality of the convent, and is quaintly charming in a provincial manner, in its setting of palmettos



CHRÉTIEN POINT

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with a forest behind. It was probably an out-building for some houses which preceded the convent, and now has vanished leaving not a wrack behind, save this quaintly charming relic.



A harmonious spirit prevails in that section somehow. In most American communities there is a scattering of tastes, of efforts, of interests in all directions, but here there seems to be a common blend. There is a bordering of osage orange along the way, great, fluffy clusters of it, then the road is rather thickly studded with houses, houses large, houses small, nice houses, not remotely suggesting imitation, but none the less inevitably deriving the spirit of their being from the same root, with their wide galleries, safe against the sun, safe against the rain, and free for the play of every breath of air.

Chrétien Point belongs to a grave silver twilight, a twilight without regrets, as peaceful as old age. Perhaps it seemed so because it was in the twilight that we first came upon it, and it seemed the one right end of the road that led to it, a climax so inevitable that it was satisfying, not startling.

It had been a day of weeping rain, that had played itself out and left a gray sky, occasionally bright. The fields were dewy and the smell of them good, the low June cotton and the cane, endlessly, with trees bordering them, lost in the green background, or springing suddenly to shape against the gray sky. We asked our way of

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two colored women who were slouching down the road with rhythmic motion; one of them wore a flame-colored dress that seemed positively spectacular, the other wore a checked gingham, and both were barefoot. They stared vacuously at the question; evidently, it was too much to expect that their eyes and ears should both function at once, and they gave the eyes the precedence. However, a repetition of the question sank slowly into the consciousness of the flame-colored one and she suggested:

“dey’s Shutseston down de road; ye might could ast dere.”

Shuteston,—at which point a cross-road store suggested the road, whereupon there were more fields, a side road that was rolling country lane, through woods that were a tangled thicket and clumps of tall trees, with the vines dark, shapeless masses, an open, swampy stretch with a line of trees cutting it cleanly and telling of a bayou, and beyond, the grey day silvered with a belated touch of sunshine. Then a rise in the ground, more trees, an open space at the top, across a bare field, and there, clearly through widely spaced, gigantic oaks, crowning the last rising lurch of ground, Chrétien Point, imposing quiet.

It is a massively proportioned place; the oaks before it are massive, the extent of its blood-red bricks is massively conceived; and its great white Ionic columns, set in their simply sturdy square bases, are massive in effect. The roof slope is shallow; the ground falls away slightly behind the house, so that the great square bulk of it is thrown in relief above the green waste of tree-tops, against the silver-grey sky, touched with mauve by then, we watched in a certain awe of this sudden remote stateliness, flooded with final flare of rose-gold.

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It is a twilight place. There is no sign of decay about it, but the six great Ionic columns have a dingy tone to their whiteness; the grounds under the four-fold colonnade of oaks in front show no sign of care, there is a pervasive shabbiness about it. We would have been startled had a young person opened the door when we lifted the knocker. But two old ladies came, fittingly, simply dressed and kindly. A third came across the fields a few minutes later, and then a man past middle age, roughly clad, but well-mannered. They talked pleasantly, the ladies in thin, quiet voices, the man in deep, sober tones. Their relationship was never quite clear, but they were all descended from the old planter of the little churchyard in Grand Coteau, he of the five hundred slaves and the countless acres, which it seemed until quite recently actually counted four thousand acres.

The family still holds the original grant given by Peter Declouet in 1776 and couched in formal Spanish, done into English equally quaint. Hippolyte Chrétien, the great-great-grandfather of the present owner, with his five hundred slaves, and his land, and his wealth wanted a good house. And he had masons from France,—the same, it seems likely, who worked on St. Charles College, and perhaps on the old Weeks Place, in New Iberia. The slaves got lumber from the swamps,—cypress and oak. They hauled sand for miles from the bayou, they made bricks, and worked steadily, till, at the end of four years, the house was completed. Dramatically enough, its owner died six months later.

One does homage mentally to these French masons: to the carpenters and builders, for the house is built in lordly style, from the large lines of its planning, with the six great Ionic columns, to the least

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detail of the beaded door trim and carefully wrought hardware. The galleries are deep, the one on the first floor level with the ground and brick paved. There are three great doors with windows between on each floor. The windows are curved at the top in a prettily rounded arch, and the window squares are made to match. The great doorways, which show the massive thickness of the walls, are beautifully constructed, the heavy doors panelled and the wood-work delicately beaded. They have side lights and are topped with rounded arches that echo the arch of the windows. When the rounded shutters are opened the length of the gallery, the design of this succession of curves outlined against the old red-brick structure is delightful. Every detail of the building shows unsparing care, time and labor; everything bespeaks durability, solidity. The trim is all of the original cypress, even to the shingles on the roof, everything is mortised and pegged and made by hand; nails counted not at all in its construction. The gutter that runs around the roof looks like half a tree.

So it was within doors where there was a bareness in the great, high-ceilinged rooms. Pictures of the Chrétien ladies of past generations primly painted, slightly faded, with thin faces vaguely sweet, hung on the walls. The mantels were superb. They were Italian mantles, mostly verde-antique marble. The supports swelling at the top to a square panel with a carved decoration. The top is a slab of black onyx which bellies gently outward toward the center, supported on Ionic columns of the verde antique with black onyx caps, and a line of black onyx edges the verd-antique of the foundation and its ornamented panel.

There were some nice pieces of old furniture about. One of the

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most interesting was a huge old three panelled wardrobe, made of solid mahogany, overlaid with a veneer of mahogany beautifully grained and trimmed exquisitely with a beading of long, interlaced rosettes.

But, even so, there was an emptiness in the place. Its acres are under cultivation prosperously, but its life and spirit seem somehow of the past. The footsteps of its five hundred slaves are missing, perhaps,—their quarters were fifty outbuildings, all of brick, which flanked the house and extended far down into the fields behind. But all of these have been destroyed. The stories of its past seem more vivid than its present, and the stories are legion. Some date back to Indian actors, there are many of the Civil War, with a tangible commentary in a neat oval hole that slants up through the heavy door on the second floor, when a Union Officer shot at an old paralytic patriot who defied him there,—though afterwards, they were friends, it seems. And it should be mentioned that the plantation is ranked in the legion of places where Lafitte's gold is said to have been hidden.





CHAPTER VII

IN AND ABOUT NATCHITOCHES

*Founding of Natchitoches, Spanish Fragments, Cane River,
Bermuda, Melrose*



THE bayou and level reaches of southern Louisiana fail in the Natchitoches region. Here is rolling, wooded country; the roads take their way, sometimes built up high across depressions that are valleys in miniature, sometimes cutting through knolls of red clay, where the scar of the gash is partially healed with vines and trees and underbrush. The Red River goes through that section, and nowhere is the reason for its name more apparent, for it is a murky, tawny stream, that goes, tranquil or storming as the season dictates, through high, precipitous banks of red clay. The banks are bristling, towering, forbiddingly impressive as granite cliffs in places, in others, softened by foliage.

There is a great richness of color and variety of landscape in this section. To the sharp, dramatic effects of Red River and of the roadways which cut as relentlessly through the swelling red earth, there are close at hand effects quite different, the silver stretches of

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Cane River which goes its way as sweetly as a song, tranquil and daintily wooded, bordered often with willows of a tender green as gay as flowers. It is a placid stream that has something of charm of the bayous in the dreamy quiet of its flow; but it has variety in its aspects: sometimes it is almost level with the fields through which it passes, and mirrors the forms of bending willows and occasional crepe myrtles in the sleek surface; at times, it bends and twists, and turns, in one beguiling vista after another, with richness of color in high, steep, clay banks, russet like those of Red River, or mottled or brown, bare, or dressed with foliage which overhangs. Cultivated fields alternate with long wooded stretches, and always there are numerous varieties of oaks. Sunk among the slopes and hillocks the countryside is cupped with cypress swamps and offers endless vistas, with the pendent green-gray moss and the gaunt bare trunks with attendant knees, enjoining silence like a lifted finger to the million small defiances of insects and birds; above, there is the flagrant green of the clumps of minute leafage. Sunlight filters through in ghost-like improbability and is lost.

Writers and painters are beginning to exploit the varied charm of the locality. An artist's colony of unpretentious beginnings a few years back is firmly established on the banks of Cane River. Writers have often used it for a background.

Natchitoches is the oldest town in the state. There is one version of its history which dates its beginning as 1694, more than twenty years before the origin of New Orleans; asserting that some Spanish settlers established themselves there with an idea of permanence, and that they held their own hardily, although the settlement flour-

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ished but little until the French colonization, when a few French families moved in.

The new History of Louisiana by Prof. H. E. Chambers differs from this story and is probably more authoritative. He states that a Captain Juchereau de St. Denis and his party set out from Mobile in the latter part of the year 1713, and in the beginning of 1714 arrived in the country of the Natchitoches. He established a post there and left a few Canadians in charge, thus founding Natchitoches, the oldest and westernmost town in the state. The St. Denis in question was himself a center of unique tradition for, indisputably courageous and manly as he was, it is said that he was also very much a dandy, with a new vest for every Vesper service, and gay and colored coats were as numerous as his dangers. There is at least some basis for the story, for an itemized list of the contents of his extensive wardrobe still exists.

There are some records and innumerable traditions about the early French settlers. Among them figure largely the brothers Mettoyer, a name still attached to many large properties. One of them is said to have taken a colored wife, the other a white one, and the former prospered, while the latter did not. In any case, both were prolific and important in the community, judging by the frequency with which the name is met. Many of the old houses, large and small, seem to have been owned at one time or another by members of the Mettoyer family.

Throughout this section there were formerly innumerable fine houses, built, many of them, very beautifully and on a grand scale; but the momentous days in the middle of the last century, when the Civil War raged, changed that condition among so many others. It is a

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distressing fact that at that time all of the important houses between Opelousas and Natchitoches were burnt by the Union soldiers, with one exception.

The exception is a square-columned old brick place some hundred miles south from Natchitoches, which somehow managed to survive. It is of a later period than its fellow survivors of the Natchitoches region, but old enough at that, dating back to the second quarter of the last century. Its chief interest is historical rather than artistic, though age has ripened its bricks to a pleasant richness of color. It is of the square and substantial-looking type with galleries across the front on the first and second floors and the familiar mooden colonnettes.

Natchitoches is a sweet little town, brightly mellow, mildly prosperous. It is perched high up on the broad banks of the river and the main street follows its windings. The beauty of these grassy banks has been well preserved, being planted with crepe myrtles, palms, and Spanish dagger. The houses here are generally small and unpretentious, of grateful simplicity and set back in flourishing little gardens.

A small Spanish building in the center of the town is interesting as belonging to the earliest period. It is a low one-story building, gracefully proportioned, of brick and stucco, gleaming white beneath China-berry trees. Broad pilasters grace the corners of this simple little structure, with a wrought-iron railing, giving it a distinctive character.

In the rear of another building three spiral stairways of cast-iron lead at intervals up to a long second floor gallery. The character of the cast iron sets the date as about 1850.



BERMUDA

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At a high point on the banks of Cane River is Bermuda Plantation, belonging to the Prudhommes. The stream which is now designated by the prosaic modern name of Cane River was in 1832 the original Red River. Bermuda was built near a small village that had grown up around the cross-roads there, and which beautiful section was called, in picturesque French, "La Côte Joyeuse."

Prudhomme is a name which figures frequently and prominently in the history and the traditions of the Parish, and the house in question was built by one of the members of the family in 1821. The original land grant was held from Spain, and was given in 1787.

It is a rambling charming house set on whitewashed brick piers, far back from the road in a rambling cluster of trees and shrubs. Cultivated fields stretch out beyond. It covers a large ground space and there is a feeling of roominess about it, yet it maintains an effect of cozy compactness. The height of the roof at the ridge is lost in the long easy slope with which it reaches out to the slender, unemphatic colonnettes of the deep gallery. Widely and irregularly spaced oaks are set in the ground about it. One of the largest is just back of the house, and is unusually beautiful in shape, as rounded and regular as a trimmed shrub. Its mammoth form towers over the cottage, with an effect of protectiveness that emphasizes the informal comfortable domesticity, at once capacious and snug, which is the characteristic charm of the place.

Within, there is a rambling expanse of rooms that have assembled furniture from all the passing years apparently, and have managed to assimilate it all in the harmonizing solvent of time. There are a number of daguerreotypes and portraits that reveal various generations; among them are particularly noticeable certain mellow old



MELROSE

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portraits which, as a historical point, were done in Paris the year the house was built.

The weather-stained plantation store is on the road hard by. In its little back room is a rough brick chimney-place, six feet wide, where whole logs blaze on winter days. There very often in winter, or, in spring and summer, on the little gallery of the store, are to be found the venerable Mr. Alphonse Prudhomme, the present owner of the place, and his brother, of nearly the same age. Their memories go back to Civil War times and happenings. "Uncle Alphonse," as the younger generation call him, will tell at times of the old days, in a voice ringing from the far years. There are recollections of the days when, as a young soldier and ex-prisoner, he was at home on parole, and he tells of the narrow escape from destruction of the house itself, how his father was decoyed away by a guerrilla, on a plausible pretext, but who suddenly, without reason, became suspicious, broke away and rushed back just in time to stand off with his gun a little group of guerrillas who were about to set a torch to the homestead.

Full of the warm south is the spirit of Melrose Plantation, a few miles out from Natchitoches. In ample grounds before the house, a garden is set, roughly diamond-shaped, rank with swelling masses of numerous varieties of flowering sweet shrubs. Irregular paths lead through flower beds outlined in quaint fashion ready with blooms for every season of the year. Across the road in front, Cane River meanders or storms, according to the season, a narrow stream here, between rough steep banks softened with grass and the foliage of willow clumps with occasional grotesque bits of brittle Spanish dagger.

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Simple, gracious informality is the feeling of the Melrose house, and almost "pioneer" in type. It is two stories high, but makes little of the fact. The first floor was intended as a basement; the wide front gallery is set on square brick piers below, and above, a line of light square wooden colonnettes, chamfered, rise to meet the roof, which slants high and sharply and slopes out over the gallery, dwarfing the height of the second floor between it and the high basement. The extensive roof space is cut by two nicely detailed dormers, with pedimented roofs over round-arched window-heads flanked by slender pilasters. A simple open stairway leads from the basement floor to one end of the gallery.

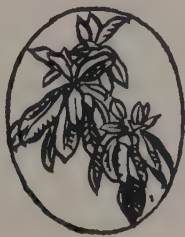
A feature obviously alien to the original pleasing simplicity of the structure is the pair of octagonal wings which have been added to the main house at each end. They were put there thirty years ago, in a way a regrettable addition, architecturally illogical, which the house cannot quite assimilate. Otherwise, the general effect of the place is charmingly consistent, with warmth and sweetness and unpretentious dignity.

In the plentiful shubbery beyond and in the back of the house are a number of small outhouses of various periods of construction; some of a sort of half-timber and adobe, crumbling but clean, overrun with vines. The composite effect is quaint and charming. One unique structure among them is a long low barn, made of cypress logs, built as solidly as stone, one would say. Its piers are mammoth millstones. It is a hardy veteran, that sturdy building. It antedates the house and is said to be of eighteenth century construction. One quaint little squat house built of half-timber and adobe, with solid planed logs serving as steps to its low, vine-hung gallery, was used as a hospital during the Civil War.

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Negroes slouch, and shuffle, and hustle about, among the houses and in the fields. An old colored woman of billowy figure, with her head wrapped in a turban, a corn-cob pipe in her mouth, appears at a side door of the basement of the main house, but turns again, with a gleaming flash of white teeth as someone within calls, "Dicey."

The house was built in 1833, the property of the family of one of the first settlers in the country. It has had a checkered career, at times brilliant, at times troubled. During the Civil War it was used as a hospital and several times was a storm-center of local disagreements, many difficulties of the Reconstruction period culminated in its vicinity. It has a store of matchless antique furniture, curios, and historic mementoes. Its normal collection assembled throughout the years has been richly added to with kindred objects collected by its present owner, Mrs. Cammie Henry, who is nationally known for her collected data on early and late Louisiana history. She has searched out, sifted and tested innumerable traditions and records of the earlier history of Natchitoches and the locality and at the same time she preserves accounts of significant current happenings. Her records are inexhaustible treasures to writers to whom she affords the use of them. At Melrose there is also dispensed a hospitality that rendered even more grateful our memories of this smiling country.





THREE OAKS

CHAPTER VIII

NEW ORLEANS AND ITS VICINITY

*Houses of the Garden District: Westfeldt, Thomson,
Mercy Hospital, Bayou St. John, Schertz, Madam
John's Legacy, Stauffer, Aurora, Belle
Chasse, Bueno Retiro*

FATE is capricious in its treatment of houses. Out in the country, in propitious surroundings, fine old landmarks have disappeared, destroyed by storm or fire, factory-building, the caprice of an owner,—in any one of dozens of ways. The city in its growth is expected to spread ruthlessly over them, and does, till suddenly, for no apparent reason, it turns aside for one or another, and progresses around instead of over it. And there it remains. Sometimes in crowded tenement sections, in a stagnant quarter once prosperous, now a backwater, in

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suave modern residence districts, such an old house appears, demanding broad acres and open fields by its whole spirit, by the intent of every line of its being, a curious contradiction to its surroundings.

The Garden District has several such examples to offer. It is a beautiful residence section, in the heart of the city, which is waning a little in prosperity now, but still beautiful. The houses there date in general to the middle of the past century, the prosperous period of the years before the Civil War. Originally, the section was called the Faubourg Ste. Marie and was the center of the American colony as distinguished from the Creoles of the older section,—the Faubourg Marigny. There are large gardens, fine old trees and a wealth of shrubbery and flowers. The houses show a curious and often charming interplay of classical traditions with French and Spanish influence; they are sophisticated and effective, built with lavish proportions. They have deep galleries and big wooden columns or slender iron ones, wrought iron railings, iron fences, or high brick walls,—essentially urban in character.

In the midst of this, at Prytania and First Streets, is the Westfeldt house, frankly, unmistakably, sweetly a country house. A fence of tall slender white pickets surrounds a half square of ground which is all garden. Magnolia trees, immense with age, offer masses of dark glistening foliage; beneath them are lighter shrubs, crepe myrtle and oleander, lantana in great clumps eight feet high, plumbago, and and endless variety of flowers—roses, rain lilies, hibiscus. They are rank in growth, riotous, groomed just enough to escape unkemptness.

Amid all this varied play of greens, in the deep shadows of the magnolias, the house appears, chastely white, fresh, restful and charming. It is square in plan and its proportions are large with an effect of

coolness and comfortable dignity. The Greek revival was evidently the dominant influence in its conception; as an architectural expression it is pure. There is a heavy Greek cornice and entablature. The only ornament is one course of square white dentils used as a bed mould. Along the front and the length of one side runs a deep gallery; the sedately sized white columns are the square type, flat in front and on the side, square at the corners of the gallery. There is a basement floor used for living purposes, of solid red brick, and tall, square brick pillars support the outer edge of the gallery. The break in color and in material of construction takes from the height of the house; a place of even smaller size differently treated could appear an imposing mansion; but this one has chosen the more gracious part, seemingly charming, capacious and inviting.

The living floor is of broad weather-board; these are placed flush across the front, so as to give the same effect of cool simplicity as the customary white plaster fronts. The treatment of the entrance door and stairway is curious. The flat columns across the front of the gallery number seven, and, as a result, the stairway has been placed off center, between the third and fourth posts, while the entrance door is on the other side, between the fourth and fifth posts. The effect of this breaking of symmetry gives a sense of domestic informality, a predominant quality of the charming place.

The entrance stairway is worth noticing. It is prettily graceful, high, swelling outward at the bottom and broken by a landing half way up, that has quaint newel posts with balls on top.

The house looks as trim and fresh and solid as though it were built this year,—and is perhaps more solid. Actually it has been standing

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there just as trim and fresh for more than a century. It was built in the early twenties of the last century by one Thomas Toby, who came here from Philadelphia. It had several open acres about it



BEAUREGARD

when it was erected and the house he built became a social as well as geographical landmark. It is now between the commercial and the residential section, though at that time it was out of the city limits. What is now the corner of Jackson and Prytania Streets was on the boundary line of the estate. It was for a time the end of the city bus line and was known as "Toby's Corner."

Mr. Thomas Toby lingers on in the city legends as a picturesque character, full of warm enthusiasms and eccentricities. All the lumber for building his house was transported by him from Philadelphia, in the face of the cypress swamps close at hand. He was an ardent partisan of Texas in the Mexican War and lent the Texas government a hundred thousand dollars for ammunition and pro-

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visions, a bit of generosity for which his heirs were later recompensed by thanks and a small settlement. He married into the prominent Creole family of Augustin and had eleven children. One of his whims was that each child should have the name of a state, so that he had among others, a son named Texas, daughters Alabama Emila, Louisiana Delphine, Indiana Clara and so on.

The house passed out of the possession of his family after the Civil War, and was bought eventually by the Dugans, whose descendants, the Westfeldts, still own it. At one time a long back wing, which was a usual and not often fortunate method of expansion, was added to the original building, but its present owners had the good taste to destroy it and leave the original house, simple and charming.

On the outer limits of the Garden District is the old Hayden house as it is still often called, or, just as frequently, the Thomson house, for it was taken over by Mrs. James Thomson, who was Genevieve Clark, a daughter of Champ Clark, when she made New Orleans her home. It was in a state of extreme dilapidation, but was restored understandingly and with noteworthy success.

The influence of the Greek Revival is as strongly evident in it as in the Westfeldt house, though differently expressed. It is a very large place, imposing, with more formality and perhaps less charm than the Westfeldt house. It is tall and has an effect of lightness in proportion, obtained partly by making the windows narrow and tall. The high basement wall is of white brick, the main floor is of white stucco. A gallery runs the length of the front of the house supported by eight high white brick piers, to which correspond on the main floor, flat white wooden columns. Slightly pointed cornices over the long, narrow windows and over the doors accentuate the

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impression of height. The main floor is more open than the basement floor, and the doorway there is slightly more important. It was formerly the main entrance, and there was a wide central entrance stay-way which broke the great width of the front. In the course of renovation the stairway was removed and the basement door used for entrance, and one feels that architecturally the house has lost interest thereby.

Nearer the commercial center of the city and the French section, or old quarter, which was the original town of New Orleans, is the Mercy Hospital, which was once a handsome riverside country house. It shows a very urban treatment of the plantation house idea. It is of immense size with a brick-covered basement, and is surrounded on all sides by huge galleries with wrought iron columns and railing. The original character of the house has almost disappeared, however, what with additions and numerous renovations, including a liberal use of moss-green paint. Advertising boardings on all sides complete the effacement. It remains striking by reason of its size, but as a pure example of early plantation architecture is quite spoiled.

The smug inanity of the Mercy Hospital shows that renovation can be more disastrous than decay, where charm is in question. On the other side of the picture is an ancient home near Lee's Circle in Camp Street. It is a shabby commercial section, of second-hand stores and tenement houses, dingy and ugly. The house in question is hemmed in by grimy, squalid neighbors, and it is in a dilapidated condition, which is not concealed by a recent coat of bright yellow paint. Commercially worthless, it inevitably arrests attention. Its original character, marked by a certain grace and distinction, shows wear but not change,—an aristocrat in sore straits.

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It is built of brick and smooth stucco, in proportions informed with a feeling of elegant stateliness. Galleries of moderate width with tall columns run around three sides of the house, and there are dormers, delightfully consistent with the quality of the place, excellent in themselves for the rare purity and refinement of detail which characterize them; there are two slender colonnettes at the sides of each of them, and very fine mouldings. In the rear the first and second floor galleries are enclosed between tall columns, and are glassed in and panelled.

The house is in a sad condition, falling to pieces, battered, weather-beaten, weather-stained, but still gracious,—a place which pauperism can occupy and destroy, but never actually possess.

Through the lower part of New Orleans, on out to Lake Pontchartrain, meanders Bayou St. John with a leisurely, imperceptible motion. There is a dreamy picturesqueness about it, especially in its farther reach where the city's growth is scant enough to spare the live oaks. Why, with so much natural beauty, it has not already become a favorite residential suburb remains one of the mysteries of the city development, which is always rather a mystery; the cow-path theory alone explains it! In the early days of the settlement a few fine houses were built there, but prosperity turned another way and the Bayou section grew shabby. Romantic stories and legends center about it none the less, and historic facts of times gone by that are as colorful as vague traditions. A great Russian princess, the unfortunate wife of Peter the Great of Russia, is supposed to have found on its banks the lover from whom her marriage had separated her. The story goes that he built a house there as a shrine



ALONG BAYOU ST. JOHN, THE SCHERTZ RESIDENCE

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for her portrait, and that later she escaped to him by means of a Juliet trick of feigned death. The waterway was early a path to the city. Indian commerce passed this way from the borders of the lake and the Indians crossed even from Mandeville and beyond, picturesquely garbed, steering their slender canoes cleanly through the still water. Many old people remember remnants of them who came that way and sat in the French Market selling their wares—woven baskets and rugs.

Today there is a movement on foot to restore the Bayou section, which promises great results and a reawakened interest in its residential desirability.

From the pirate-infested bays and inlets of the mouth of the river there were easy water-roads to Lake Pontchartrain, so Bayou St. John was reputed the pirate route to the city. The enigmatic, gallant figure of Lafitte hovers largely in the stories of the Bayou, and various places are pointed out as having been among his rendezvous. One of these is the old house now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Christian Schertz, who judiciously did no more to it than tidy it up, install in it some nice old furniture and so have a delightful home.

It is happily typical of the houses of the earliest period: The house is generally considered a "source" architecturally speaking. It gleams softly restful beyond high white pickets that enclose an ample garden space. There are a few big trees, with sunny open spaces between them, set with shrubs or ordered flower beds in luxuriant bloom. A brick-paved walk leads toward the house, between long flower beds that are always brilliant with bloom, and each breath of air brings a whiff of jasmine, or honeysuckle, or sweet-olive.



MADAM JOHN'S LEGACY

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

It is a small house, deliberately informal, invitingly domestic in feeling. There is a leisurely double pitch of roof out over the slender wooden colonnettes of the gallery of the main floor, in which are recalled the same tendencies which show themselves in *Madam John's Legacy* in Dumaine Street. The first floor is a basement, used as living quarters. A stairway runs up from the basement floor to the main floor at one end of the gallery, with a trellis to suggest screening,—rather in the matter of “*The Shadows of the Teche*” in New Iberia, but on a smaller scale. The openings are nice but unemphatic, alike on both floors, with French doors and trims. A door at each end of the gallery, opens directly into rooms: there is no central hall.

The basement rooms are low-ceilinged and cozily proportioned. There are two in front with long hall behind them, containing a stairway and opening at one end to the kitchen and service rooms. A wide central door gives out from it upon a pretty rose garden with many shrubs and fan-shaped trellises for the vines. In the dining-room on the first floor there still hangs a “punkah” over the dining-room table, a precursor of the electric fan of today; it is a big single cloth wing which used to be kept in desultory motion by a string operated by a little darky slave-boy. In the living room, which is the other main room of the basement floor, where are now a grand piano, a harp and fine antique furniture, Lafitte is said to have established one of his headquarters, and the story goes that he once had a man run a café there as a blind for the meetings of his men.

Of much later date and definitely more impressive in manner is the Joseph Bernard house on the Bayou. It has been recently restored, and very successfully, by the architect, Moise Goldstein. While

OLD PLANTATION HOUSES IN LOUISIANA

not actually a plantation house, it is still eloquent of the best that was to be found, architecturally, in some of those later examples.

In the same direction, a mile or so away, lies Metairie, on the outskirts of the city. The ground is very high and there is a graceful plenty of old oaks. From the highroad there opens pleasantly a short country lane. It leads past a brief grove of small trees to a high fence or split saplings. There, in a sunny open space against a background of live-oaks, is the Stauffer House, immaculately white, well-groomed and essentially a plantation house, with its brick piers, broad galleries and Greek columns. Obviously, it has stood there some hundred years.

But beware the obvious; it is deceptive: notably so here. For the presence of the house in its present location is one of those bits of modern daring that are akin to poetry in their conception. A few years ago, this same house stood behind the levee above the city, five miles away, shabby, uncared for, only partly occupied and in a dreary section. Its present owner saw it and coveted it for the oaks of Metairie. Her first thought was to have it rolled through the streets, but that, of course, proved impracticable, and the whole idea was discouraged; but at last she found an architect and a contractor who agreed to take it all down and put it together again in the new location, a feat which was actually performed and with a success well worth the difficulties it involved. Medea, said the Greeks, took a ram, cut it up, put it in a cauldron and out it came whole again—a frisking lamb. Much the same miracle, it seemed here,—and more authentic!—when the handsome, shabby old house on the river front was taken remorselessly to pieces and appeared soon after five miles away nothing but orderly stacks of lumber and brick, cabalistically

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numbered. A few months more and there it stands, substantial, rejuvenated, but essentially the same as when it was first built, in 1830.

It was called the Hurst Place, for its original owner. He had one of the largest plantations in the vicinity of the city. The dole of his arpents, as recorded in the titles, are cut into many city blocks today. Hurst Street is named for him, and Arabella, Eleanor and Amelia Streets are said to have been so called in honor of his daughters. The house was built at the climax of his prosperity, and he failed soon after its completion. The property was divided and the house passed through many neglectful hands before it attained its present happy apotheosis.

Though it was constructed after the early period of plantation building, its characteristic features are typical of that period. At the same time there is a marked originality, evidently consciously striven for, but thoroughly in character, and there is a definite elaborateness and elegance of detail and decoration hardly to be found in earlier examples—so fine as to justify its being termed a "museum piece" and worthy of the Early American wing of the Metropolitan.

The whole body of the house is of white brick, with only the gable ends of the roof of weather boarding. A broad gallery supported by brick piers runs around all four sides, and the characteristic classical influence is in predominant evidence, in the white columns of the Greek Doric Order, fluted, gracefully proportioned and simply round capped. There is a pedimented frieze with triglyphs of elegance and dignity.

A long flight of broad steps lead to the central doorway, which is

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broad and has side-lights; over it is a low, broad fan-transom. There are finely detailed mouldings and flutings and a not too weighty suggestion of massiveness in the delicate classical columns as supports.

While the Doric order is used for the main columns of the porch, those of the doorway are a Greek Ionic. The same variation is repeated in windows which are set into the gable ends of the roof; these windows are broad, and repeat in their slope and detail the ideas expressed in the central doorway.

The basement is a variation from typical plans in that it was evidently not brought into service for living purposes. It presents a solid front of white brick, broken only by the small lunettes for openings. The entrances to it are at the sides. Originally it was used for imprisoning slaves, apparently, and there were gruesome finds of three iron rings in the walls, of iron manacles and bars, when the house was moved, that, silently, tell a grim story. The present owner puts it to the much more cheering use of kitchen and store-rooms. In its former state the kitchen and service rooms were taken care of in outbuildings, after the usual manner of the time.

Passing within the handsome white doorway, one finds an interior exactly such as the exterior demands, a general effect of bright simplicity fastidiously preserved over a hard elegance of ornamentation in details, unelaborate but refined, but the feeling for ornamentation finds expression in the woodwork, which is superbly executed. The door frames throughout the house are hand-turned, and all are decorated with an intricate carving in a vine motif. The baseboards are high and are finished at the top with a series of fine mouldings, also done by hand.



AN OLD SPANISH HOUSE, BATON ROUGE

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There are splendid black marble mantels in all the rooms. In the living room recessed book shelves have been placed on either side of the mantel and across the width of the opposite end of the room from it.

The most vital of the alterations was in the back of the house, which was originally a large central room with small L-shaped rooms at each end. This plan was changed so that the whole of the back of the house is divided between the dining-room and living-room, while the arm of the L has been used on one side for pantry service and steps to the basement kitchen and the small stair-room, and on the other side for a dressing room and bath.

The restoration, by the architect, Richard Koch, has been thorough; it has touched the garden as felicitously as it has the house, and the setting seems a vital factor of its charm. A wide pathway leading to the central steps is planted thickly with low rose-bushes, of the Louis Philippe variety, that are starred all the year round with gay, red, fragrant bloom. A clump of banana trees is planted at one end of the gallery and the broad green of their drooping blades echoes the green of the blinds and aids them in breaking restfully the sharp, clean white of the house. On one side of the house is a diminutive formal garden, outlined by a low hedge. The beds are laid out simply, and gay with color at all seasons of the year. They are presided over by diminutive grey stone statues of the seasons, at the four corners. Big live-oaks are in the background everywhere and give an effect of deliberate seclusion.

Aurora Plantation, on the other side of the river, has had a fate quite different from that of the Hurst House. It has been changed from time to time but never restored in any sense of the word, and

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the changes have been dictated chiefly by expediency—pillars altered, extensions made, chimneys added—until the original character, reputed charming, has been lost. It is rather a haphazard structure, but a pleasant arrangement of foliage about it with palms and palmettos and clumps of cape jasmine in the sunny open spaces about the house, and great trees in the background, relieve the more unsatisfactory architectural characteristics. It has recently been bought by a land development company with a view to restoring it for use as a club. The experiment will be interesting to watch.

Another restoration presently to be undertaken is that of Bellechasse, formerly the home of Judah P. Benjamin. It is on the far side of the river from New Orleans. It is in a locality very sparsely occupied, and it stands withdrawn from the world, immense, open to the clear sunlight, which shows it silent, deserted, and falling to pieces. There are low palms on either side of the brick wall leading up to it, relics of former dignity, and a few taller palms and palmettos in the rough field about it, which is overgrown with rank grass; from the front gallery, the seared green swell of the levee is not twenty yards away, with the masts of a ship showing over it.

It is a huge place, impressive by reason of its size, but somewhat lacking in grace. Wide galleries run around all four sides, and each face presents eight excessively tall gaunt square columns. At one end of the rear gallery, which is away from the river front, is a wide stairway. There are large doors and windows and a deep plain cornice. A curious feature is the attic, which is raised in a shallow pitched roof at the line of the walls of the building and expresses the same idea that is found in French quarter attic stories.

The house is to be restored by a society organized under the leader-

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ship of a prominent New Orleans architect, Gen. Allison Owen, for that definite purpose. Its association with Judah P. Benjamin, one of the outstanding figures of the Confederacy and of the Reconstruction days, and with the numerous distinguished guests he entertained there, make it interesting historically.

Just below New Orleans, some three or four miles, with one side of it is the shadow of a massive factory—a great sugar refinery and crowded on the other side by a levee and steamship, is “Three Oaks Plantation.” The type represented by this example was of a development later than that of Sarpy Mansion. This is the better known kind of plantation house and fits more accurately into the popular conception. Three Oaks is also one of the historical landmarks of Louisiana. The old Beauregard house is just beyond, hidden by a grove of live-oaks and probably almost forgotten. This house was built in 1840 by Gallier, the architect of the old French Opera, for his friend, the Marquis de Trava, and was called Bueno Retiro. It was acquired many years later by Judge René Beauregard, son of the famous general of the Confederacy. Here the body of the house is smaller and less pretentious, but more indigenous in type. It is altogether more charming in color and proportions than Three Oaks.

It is not difficult to imagine the life of the Old South and its aristocracy among such settings as this. Simplicity and an honest dignity are here perfectly expressed. The house is quite well preserved and age has contributed a certain mellowness. The row of stately old columns, eight across the front, have acquired just sufficient discoloration and the grand old triple oak has become just sufficiently gnarled with its gesticulating limbs to lend the place a glamor and feeling of old time, ante-bellum dignity.

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These old houses that exist in Louisiana form a sort of architectural résumé from all the years when Louisiana was a province of France and Spain and through the first half century of its inclusion in the Union. In regarding the splendid array and their rare interest, architectural and otherwise, we begin to suspect them of having been seriously overlooked as traditional fragments of importance. How significant they are of the diversity of material that has gone into the making of the traditions of this country,—traditions from so many different sources! The eventual conclusion is, naturally, that the Louisiana plantation houses, representing a distinct phase in the architectural history of the country, become a "source" in themselves and will probably be increasingly so regarded.



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